

FINDING THE SACRED IN THE CITY:  
MAPPING THE SACRED SPACES OF LOS ANGELES

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## **Abstract**

### **FINDING THE SACRED IN THE CITY: MAPPING THE SACRED SPACES OF LOS ANGELES**

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The urban context creates a new way of living and engaging with the places in which we live. As the world's population continues to migrate to urban areas our relationship to place shifts. Urbanization particularly creates the phenomenon of desensitized built environments, feelings of displacement, and social exclusions. In response to these unique conditions of urban living, communities in the city need to reimagine and recreate urban places with meaningful sense experiences, a sense of identity, and invitations to belong. This paper proposes that sacred spaces in the city are one way to revitalize our connection to the city. Even more, religious congregations have a responsibility to steward their spaces to create meaningful experiences of place for urban dwellers. Through the urban planning methodologies of mapping, walking, and direct observations this study looks at sacred spaces in two Los Angeles neighborhoods. By using urban planning methodologies this study presents a new way to look at religious congregations. The results of this study reveal that urban neighborhoods are equipped with a variety of traditional and informal sacred spaces. We need, however, spiritual practices of place in the city to truly engage with the sacred in the city and to incorporate the sacred into our everyday lives.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Why Study Urban Sacred Spaces**

#### ***Introduction***

The presence of sacred architecture throughout human history, from the very simple to extremely elaborate, demonstrates two common patterns about humanity. First, sacred spaces express a human longing to connect to divine and supernatural possibilities. Sacred spaces are visual representations of an inward curiosity to experience, communicate, or understand otherworldly realities that we otherwise cannot see. Some historic sacred sites are even believed to manifest supernatural powers or carry a divine presence. The second pattern that the prevalence of sacred spaces reveals is that human beings desire to experience the supernatural in concrete and tangible ways. Although supernatural beings are not confined to human places, as finite beings humans are limited by place. So we invest in places by building homes, towns, and cities. In the same way, human cultures design and build sacred spaces to represent and experience the supernatural in tangible, material, and physical ways. Through altars, chapels, and temples devotees recreate an otherworldly reality in real time and real place. Consequently, religion is an extensive network of material and bodily rituals, symbols, myths, and architecture. This research begins with the assumption that human beings are still drawn to sacred spaces. Even as modern societies change and fewer people today claim religious affiliations, at the very least sacred spaces hold great value as peaceful, historical, or beautiful places. Therefore, people can be drawn to sacred spaces for the purpose of engaging the supernatural or they are drawn to these spaces by a sense of awe and appreciation for the aesthetics.

This paper is located in this tension of the continued appreciation for sacred spaces and the changing place of religion in contemporary society. Undeniably, there is a noticeable shift in the role of sacred spaces in our towns and cities today particularly in Western nations but gradually in other cultures and cities around the globe as well. The most noticeable trend is the decline and closures of traditional congregations. Whereas in previous centuries towns and cities often evolved around a central sacred space, religious spaces today have lost their primary place in the city. In the past sacred spaces were just as much the community's main social spaces as they were devotional spaces. In this century, however, sacred spaces have greatly lost their role as primary thirdspace for the community. As neighborhoods shift in demographics religious congregations in the neighborhood often do not keep up with the changes. The rhythms of sacred spaces today no longer match the rhythms of the neighborhood around it. Instead, many churches and temples in the city are gated and closed during the week. In some cases the departure of a congregation ends in the demolition of a sacred space and in other cases the space is passed on to another congregation or repurposed for a new use. These shifts in the role of sacred architecture demonstrate that sacred spaces today need to find new purposes, different rhythms, and alternative forms. Therefore, this paper seeks to understand the role of sacred space in this century using two Los Angeles neighborhoods as a case study. This research will explore the forms sacred spaces are taking today in a major city like Los Angeles in order to understand the trends in urban religion today and to describe the new functions of sacred spaces in civic society and culture.

Unlike a traditional ethnographic approach to congregational studies the main subject of this study is space rather than congregations. Therefore this study will not

involve an in-depth ethnography of specific communities of faith. Instead, this study looks at the breadth of sacred spaces in the city and their relationship to the city in order to understand the sacred cityscape. Looking at the sacred cityscape will reveal a different set of data than a traditional ethnography. Rather than looking at what a congregation believes or what they do, this paper looks at the types of spaces that are effective and how space is used. Congregations are recognized in this study as the people of faith that engage with sacred spaces. Congregations carry the traditions of a space and have the potential to activate a space. Studying space as the main subject of research means studying the purposes, rhythms and significances of spaces in the city.

### ***Definitions***

Before outlining the goals of this project in this section I define a few frequently used terms. First, the terms *place* and *space* are used interchangeably in this paper. Generally, place refers to named locations while space is open. Philip Sheldrake writes in *Spaces for the Sacred* that a place has a name, carries stories, and holds memories.<sup>1</sup> A place can be a bedroom, a home, a chapel, a park, a forest or even a city. We can identify a place by its name and share stories about the places that are significant to us. Places are the meeting points and the contexts for the occurrences of everyday human life. Spaces, on the other hand, generally refer to the areas in between places. Henri Lefebvre wrote that one way to understand space is experienced through actual physical movements through a space.<sup>2</sup> When we move right and left, forward and back we are experiencing space. Furthermore, our ability to see allows us to estimate the expanse of space. Most

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 33.

importantly our minds are needed to conceptualize space, because space is also an abstract concept. Space cannot be touched and space cannot easily be contained. Space can refer to wide-open expanses but also to an alley in between buildings. Space is the area between altar and pews in a church. Space can be more abstract, whereas place tends to be more concrete and tangible.

At the same time, space contains places and places contain space. Even if they carry distinct definitions, places and spaces always exist together. Therefore to refer to space is also to refer to places and to refer to places is also to refer to space. To demonstrate the close relationship between place and space Geographer Yi Fu Tuan defines place as object and pause. Tuan argues that if space is experienced through movement, then places are the objects that cause us to pause our movements.<sup>3</sup> The pause is a moment to acknowledge a place as different than the space one is moving in. Space, therefore, can easily become place through a moment of recognition. Tuan mentions that when a space starts to feel familiar it becomes place.<sup>4</sup> When space is given meaning and acknowledged it becomes place. Tuan also writes, “Enclosed and humanized space is place.”<sup>5</sup> Whereas space can give either a sense of freedom or fear, place gives a sense of security.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, places define the shapes of space. When we are describing a place larger than what we can perceive through the senses, then we begin to refer to space.<sup>7</sup> Because of this ebb and flow between space and place, this paper uses the term

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<sup>3</sup> Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>7</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, "Sense of Place: What Does It Mean to Be Human?," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (1997): 51.

that is most appropriate for the context, but also acknowledges that each term contains the other.

The next set of terms that needs to be defined is *city*, *urban* and *built environment*. These three terms refer to the setting in which this study takes place. Generally, the terms city or urban are defined by population size or density. In this paper, however, the terms city and urban refer to an environment and a way of living. Urban describes the experience of living in a dense area where not only people live in close proximity but buildings, cultures, businesses, public spaces, and civic life are all easily accessible.<sup>8</sup> Urban describes an active and busy environment with layers of economic, political, and cultural activity. In his research on urban pastors in *Sabbath in the City* Bryan Stone writes, "'Urban,' in other words, is not only a word describing place. It is also a word describing the way we 'practice place,' and this always has to do with much more than visible geography alone. It includes the way we encounter, walk, order, situate, orient, or temporalize place...the way we make places function."<sup>9</sup> In other words, the city context changes the rhythms and activities of day-to-day life. Urban is an adjective that describes the complexities of cities. Cities come out of human ambition and human innovation. Cities encompass both the potential of human ability as well as the worst of human vices. Consequently, each city around the globe carries a unique identity, but at the same time, shares these common characteristics of density, commerce, and politics with a mix of cultures, religions, and civic activity.

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<sup>8</sup> Edward L. Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Bryan P. Stone and Claire E. Wolfeich, *Sabbath in the City: Sustaining Urban Pastoral Excellence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 4.

This paper looks at sacred spaces specifically in an urban context because the world population is increasingly living in large urban areas. Some communities even live in cities where it is very difficult to even travel to a non-urban area. Relevant to this paper is the fact that urban affects the way sacred spaces take form and are utilized. Urban also affects how communities engage with religion. Therefore, another term related to the context is *built environment*. The built environment refers to the parts of a city designed, built, and created by people. Architecture, landscape, and the layout of streets in the city are all examples of the built environment. In fact, almost all of a city is built environment since cities are inherently places created by human ideas and human hands. The built environment in this study refers to how places and spaces are designed and built in the city and how they are used. The built environment forms the character and culture of a space.

The last set of key terms to define is *sacred space, sacred, spirituality, and religion*. In the book *American Sacred Space* David Chidester and Edward Linenthal begin their study of sacred spaces by dividing any definition of sacred space into two categories of either *substantial* or *situational* perspectives.<sup>10</sup> A substantial perspective believes that the designation of something sacred comes from a higher power. In this view, sacred space is where something otherworldly takes place in this world making the place more holy than the places around it. Mircea Eliade is often quoted as the primary theorist of a substantial perspective.<sup>11</sup> His groundbreaking book *The Sacred and the Profane* made a clear separation of the world into the two properties of sacred and

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<sup>10</sup> David Chidester and Edward Tabor Linenthal, *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 6.

profane. This distinction makes the sacred inherently different and holy as opposed to the empty nature of profane spaces. Eliade wrote that every sacred space implies a hierophany where the sign of a sacred presence or holy miracle happened.<sup>12</sup> This sign begins the sacrality of the space and turns it into a named place. From that moment of a sacred act Eliade explained that each sacred space functions as an “axis mundi” or a pillar that connects a place on earth to the holy above.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the substantial perspective believes that sacred spaces contain special properties, which gives these places meaning beyond this immediate world. The substantial view, however, is less and less common in the field of religious studies. Instead, most academic definitions of sacred space fall under the situational classification.

A situational perspective starts with the belief that nothing is inherently sacred; instead what is called sacred is a social construction. The situational perspective states that sacred spaces are created either socially by a gathering of people with shared religious beliefs or through the practice of religious rituals. Jonathan Smith followed Eliade’s work with great criticism and represented the situational perspective. His book *To Take Place*, proposed that human beings do the work of transforming a space through rituals.<sup>14</sup> Sacred space according to Smith is the same as any other space unless a community designates a space as sacred. This perspective of sacred spaces generally does not acknowledge supernatural intervention. Instead, human communities conceptualize and organize sacred spaces. A sacred space in this view reflects a specific community of

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<sup>12</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), 27.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 103.

people that identify with a shared culture that could include socioeconomic status, political affiliations, race, nationality, ethnicity or other cultural identities in addition to shared religious beliefs.

In a situational perspective sacred spaces are places of social gathering, but what truly distinguishes a sacred space from other places of social gathering are rituals and liturgy. Sigurd Bergmann is a Christian theologian who writes extensively on sacred spaces. In his book *Religion, Space, and the Environment* Bergmann explains that rituals and place have a reciprocal relationship.<sup>15</sup> Bergmann argues that through our bodily movements we temporarily and permanently transform the space of practice into a “symbolic space.”<sup>16</sup> Through the movements a relationship is created between person, place, and the supernatural world. This three-way relationship turns place into a sacred space. Religious practices transform the place into a concrete, significant place for the community rather than an abstract space without meaning. Through rituals, our bodies make use of space. Chidester and Linenthal write, “...ritualization is perhaps best understood as a particular type of embodied, spatial practice.”<sup>17</sup> Rituals require participants to engage in religious beliefs physically and through those movements they also engage with the places and spaces of their community. These movements then allow the body to experience a space as sacred. Through community meals, prayers, singing, offerings and other common religious practices practitioners are engaged in making their space meaningful. Chidester and Linenthal write that rituals can reclaim any ordinary

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<sup>15</sup> Sigurd Bergmann, *Religion, Space, and the Environment* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 79.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>17</sup> Chidester and Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, 9.



space as sacred space.<sup>18</sup> When a new religious community enters a nondescript community room or the space of another religious tradition and begins their routine rituals in that space, they begin to change that space into something significant and sacred. The space is given a new story and its history has a new trajectory. This process of creating sacred spaces through traditional rituals is especially relevant in this century with growing migrant populations around the world learning to adapt to new homes and unfamiliar architecture.

Similarly, within religious rituals liturgical movements can help create sacred spaces. Liturgy can be broadly defined as the order of public worship. Sacred spaces are expressions of liturgy because they physically establish an order for worship. Richard Kieckhefer proposes in the book *Theology in Stone* that the process of entering a church is a metaphor. When one enters a church, one is entering a spiritual journey.<sup>19</sup> Within a sacred space there are different stages, transitions, and markers that are metaphors for life. Kieckhefer describes, "The ebb and flow of liturgical movement echoes the rhythms of spiritual life and the Neoplatonic theme of procession and return: all things flow out from God and return to God."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the prescribed movements, words, and actions in space are facilitated by traditional liturgy and represent the human search for meaning both physically and metaphorically. This relationship between liturgy, movement, and religious buildings together create a sacred time and a sacred space. Thus, consideration of liturgical traditions can influence how a sacred space is built. Finally, Kieckhefer also describes sacred spaces as historic places. Liturgical movement allows

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 27.

the community to participate in the history of their religious tradition in a tangible way.<sup>21</sup> Through liturgy practitioners can join a long history of sacred practices experienced in that same space.

As these various definitions of sacred space demonstrate sacred space can be a complex term to define. This paper carries both substantial and situational understandings of sacred space in tension. The making of a sacred space usually involves a community of people, but I also believe it is important to leave open the possibility that there can also be sacred spaces created by entities humans cannot fully comprehend. There can be a mysterious or mystical nature of sacred spaces that perhaps cannot be defined but is felt. Philip Bess brings this tension together in the idea of *sacred presence* and *sacred anticipation*.<sup>22</sup> Sacred presence occurs when the sacred chooses to reveal itself and sacred anticipation is when a space is made sacred by a human act to offer that space to the sacred. Bell proposes that sacred presence and anticipation happen together as one process of “a sacred call and a human response.”<sup>23</sup> Sacred space may include the initiation of an otherworldly power as well as the human acts of worship in response to that power. Therefore, rather than defining sacred space either as a cultural creation or a supernatural creation this paper recognizes that within the definition of sacred space there are many layers that come together to create a sacred space.

For the purpose of this project sacred spaces are defined as the contexts of spirituality. Therefore, the term *spirituality* is used in this paper to refer to the human process of finding wholeness. This process of finding wholeness can be achieved through

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Bess, *Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), 69.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 70.

interactions with a divine being and a supernatural reality or through a greater awareness of the self. Spirituality uses outward practices to attend to the inner life and attends to a desire to find and create greater meaning in life. In this process a place, activity, or belief can become *sacred* when they become set apart as part of the greater meaning or purpose of life. *Religion* in this understanding is the set of rituals, symbols, myths, beliefs, structure, and architecture formed through communal and organized forms of spirituality. Sacred spaces are places that facilitate the spiritual search for wholeness.

Our practices of religion and spirituality always happen in place. Congregations meet in cathedrals, community rooms, and auditoriums. They take communion, get baptized, and celebrate marriage in particular places. They celebrate life and mourn deaths in place. They pray, fast, share meals, and worship in place. Individuals find places of prayer to connect with the divine or to connect with one's soul. When places become part of our spiritual experiences, both our conscious and unconscious spiritual experiences become real, tangible, and accessible. All three components of the mystical, social designation, and ritual can be used to create a sacred atmosphere and create a space for spiritual purposes. Sacred spaces as containers of spirituality are both imaginary and real. It is where a community recognizes mystery and engages with their beliefs and hopes outside of this world through rituals and practices. When a space becomes sacred it is a place set apart to allow us to attend to the inner life. Since the supernatural cannot be seen or felt, sacred spaces allow us to visualize and touch the characteristics of the supernatural. This definition of sacred spaces as the contexts of spirituality is intentionally broad and open so that the research findings can help articulate and refine

this definition. The findings of this project help describe the contexts of spirituality for urban populations and what sacred spaces look like in cities.

Finally, this paper makes a further distinction between traditional sacred spaces and informal spaces. A traditional sacred space is created by architecture and intentionally designed for a religious tradition. Frequently a religious organization or leadership designates a traditional sacred space and continues the traditions of the space. A traditional sacred space is often recognizable through its art, architecture, and other symbols. Churches, cathedrals and temples are examples of traditional sacred spaces. An informal sacred space is a space that may not be designated as a religious space but is considered sacred to a select group of people or even to an individual. An informal sacred space may be a roadside shrine or a private nook in the park used for prayer. Informal sacred spaces have a temporary quality and may not be recognized as sacred by everyone that uses the space. Ritual is a tool most often used to make informal spaces sacred. It is easier to identify traditional sacred spaces since they have signs that mark them as sacred. Informal sacred spaces, however, are difficult to define and describe, but will become increasingly important as cities lose traditional church buildings and temples.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

There are two main factors that are shifting the role of sacred spaces in cities today: urbanization and secularization. This paper will specifically focus on the growing impact of urbanization on sacred architecture and religious life in the city. Secularization, although greatly leading to decline in some congregations, is a change in the thought life of society. Secularization affects belief and adherence to a religious community and is an indirect influence on built sacred spaces. As stated previously, however, the subject of

this project is space rather than congregations. Sacred spaces are physical experiences just like urban environments. Therefore, this section looks specifically at urbanization as a direct cause to the changes in sacred spaces and how communities use sacred space. Urbanization affects how we practice place and how city dwellers practice spirituality in their daily lifestyles.

Urbanization, or the growth of urban areas around the globe, is not in itself a problem. Rather, growing urban contexts is a reality that creates both problems as well as new solutions. Individuals and communities living in the city are affected by the values uniquely created by urban contexts whether for good or ill. Urban built environments affect the social as well as the religious experiences for those living in the city. Cities have the strange phenomenon of greater population density, but with a built environment geared towards individualism. For example, a typical street in a downtown area may have a greater concentration of people sharing the same sidewalks and public spaces, but that does not mean these city dwellers know or even interact with one another. Rather an urban public space makes it normal for people to share space without acknowledging others. Cities provide greater access to cultural arts and social activities, but also greater proximity to social ills like crime, poverty, and pollution. Therefore, greater urbanization means we need new and intentional ways to improve quality of life and to build meaningful communities.

Geographer Yi Fu Tuan explains that cities started as an attempt to create order. In addition to creating economic centers, the city was originally a religious act to create a

moral order and protect inhabitants from the dangers of the wilderness.<sup>24</sup> Cities were often modeled after what human communities imagined heavenly properties to be. Therefore, the city at one point physically displayed the values of a community and particularly its religious values. Cities today, however, emphasize human ideals rather than sacred or religious values. Tuan writes, “The city began as an attempt to bring the order and majesty of heaven down to earth, and it proceeded from there by cutting itself from agricultural roots, civilizing winter, turning night into day, and disciplining the sensuous human body in the interest of developing the mind.”<sup>25</sup> Tuan highlights that the advancement of cities also meant the progression of human power, abilities, and the human mind and undermined reliance on natural or supernatural resources. Consequently, cities have distanced human communities from the earth and our reliance on the earth. Cities have created unnatural technologies that allow humans to be like gods of the city. Tuan writes, “Artificiality is measured by our distance from nature.”<sup>26</sup> In cities, we now live in artificial places that incorporate materials that are human made rather than made from the earth. Therefore, Tuan finds it ironic that cities started to create an ordered utopia, but now they are seen as disordered and artificial places.<sup>27</sup> Most relevant to this study, urbanization particularly leads to greater desensitized built environments, displacement, and social exclusions. These deficiencies encourage the need for more meaningful sacred spaces in the city.

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<sup>24</sup> Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Romantic Geography: In Search of the Sublime Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 113.

<sup>26</sup> Yi-fu Tuan and Martha Strawn, *Religion: From Place to Placelessness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Yi-fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 146.

## **Desensitized Built Environments**

The city was the beginning of human attempts to address social ills but in the process cities created the unique phenomenon of desensitized built environments.

Desensitized built environments can be created through under stimulation or overstimulation of the senses. Desensitized built environments are especially created through lack of access to positive sense experiences, new developments in technology and speed, and neutral architecture. As this section reveals, desensitized built environments were created to protect and progress human communities but resulted in less meaningful places in urban contexts. Since one of the values of having sacred spaces in the city is to create meaningful spaces for our mind and body, the desensitization that comes with urbanization devalues the importance of sacred space.

Fundamentally, a lack of positive sense experiences can desensitize our experience of place. The lack of green space that includes smells of fresh air or visual greenery or lack of spaces for community interaction all lead to less meaningful experiences of place in the city. Yi Fu Tuan gives the example of the sense of smell in cities. Smells were natural to rural areas and to early experiences of the city. But as cities advanced odors were seen to carry negative moral values. Bad odors, especially, became associated with lower class neighborhoods or areas of unwelcomed ethnic communities.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, cities today try to create odorless buildings and odorless neighborhoods. Cities today, then, disconnect us from experiencing places as vibrant sense experiences. Instead, cities confuse our senses. Sennett argues that cities were created out of a fear of exposure to the harsh wilderness and to social ills. We created cities to intentionally sterilize our

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<sup>28</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Humanist Geography: An Individual's Search for Meaning* (Staunton, VA: George F. Thompson Pub., 2012), 79.

experience of place.<sup>29</sup> Cities are created as systems of walls and divisions to help us avoid contact with other people. Cities value places without the tactile senses of touch and smell.<sup>30</sup> Therefore our bodies are desensitized to experiences of place. We view the world through high-rise windows and move through places in fast moving cars. Sennett writes, “People who live in sealed communities are diminished in their development.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, cities are lacking a sense of place because we do not have the resources in cities to grow and develop as healthy persons.

Oddly, desensitized environments can also be created through overstimulation of the senses. Cities not only lack positive sense experiences, but when we are overexposed to negative sense experiences we may also disconnect ourselves from place. Urban living often means frequent exposure to harsh sense experiences such as pollution, traffic and other loud noises. When one walks through the city there can be harsh smells and irritating construction. The everyday experience of the city can wear on its inhabitants. For those that live in the city, it can be difficult to get away from constant sense stimulation. Over time, overexposure to negative sense experiences can not only push people to isolate themselves but can discourage connecting to place through the senses.

Second, motion and technology also removes sense experiences and diminishes human contact. Sennett writes, “Today, as the desire to move freely has triumphed over the sensory claims of the space through which the body moves, the modern mobile

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<sup>29</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), xii.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 256.

<sup>31</sup> Sennett, *Conscience of the Eye*, 201.



individual has suffered a kind of tactile crisis: motion has helped desensitize the body.”<sup>32</sup>

In other words, by moving through the city in cars we no longer smell, hear, or feel the city. We can drive through a place and not even acknowledge the existence of that place. Sennett writes that even the grid system of city streets neutralizes the city because every neighborhood contains the same orientation regardless of topography.<sup>33</sup>

The grid system was invented as a way to organize and expand cities, but the start of the grid system also took away a geographical center for the city. Therefore, despite the benefits of recent developments in transportation and technology, these same inventions further detach us from experiencing places as real and tangible.

Urban architecture is especially known for valuing neutralized buildings. We tend to not notice or pay any attention to the places we are in when we are surrounded by buildings that look and feel the same. Richard Sennett writes in *Conscience of the Eye*, “What we make in the urban realm are therefore bland, neutralizing spaces, spaces which remove the threat of social contact...”<sup>34</sup> According to Sennett, when buildings look all the same inside and out and in cities around the world, cities become places without meaning and neutralizes our experience of where we live. A sky rise in New York can look and feel exactly like a building in Dubai. Both carry the same values of modernization and urbanization, but take away from the uniqueness of those cities.

The gradual desensitization of our urban built environments is not often noticed, but can be contrasted with traditional sacred spaces. Traditional sacred spaces in the city are the rare places that can still be sensed and felt. When one walks into an old cathedral

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<sup>32</sup> Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*, 256.

<sup>33</sup> Sennett, *Conscience of the Eye*, 48.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

in the city one immediately notices a shift because the lighting changes, smells of candles and incense fill the air, the atmosphere is filled with a solemn silence, and the cathedral guides the eyes through its architectural movement and art. Therefore, sacred spaces in the city often exemplify built environments that are not desensitized. When one experiences a vibrant temple in the city, one begins to notice the bland nature of all our other urban buildings. The city is inherently an isolating experience. The built environment of the city, therefore, needs to revitalize our senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight. A city that is equipped with meaningful and sacred spaces needs to counteract our fear of exposure and contact with other people. The growing desensitization of our urban built environments, therefore, should inform how new sacred spaces are designed to counteract the many neutral experiences of places.

### **Displacement**

A second consequence of urbanization is a growing sense of displacement. The places we live in become part of our identity and sense of security. When meeting new people the place one grew up and the place where one currently lives are often used as identity markers. Unfortunately, desensitization and displacement are reciprocal. Neutralized places lead to less meaningful places and thus create a lack of identity in place. The busy and isolated life of the city leads to feelings of not belonging. Living in the city can create a strange sense of anonymity because one can be surrounded by many people but not actually be known. These factors combine to create the experience of displacement.

Urban living especially caused great shifts in our relationship to place. We no longer see or experience the places that produce the foods we eat. We can also now exist

and be present without place. Due to technological developments we can now exist in the nonplaces of the Internet and smartphones. Therefore, the importance of place as a felt experience is no longer prioritized or valued.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, we live in the tension of being and belonging in multiple places at once. We travel more and move more. Speed and mobility allow us to surpass places without ever recognizing those places exist. Immigration and migration are also creating global shifts as whole populations are losing their own places and adapting to new places.

One of the lasting impacts of these technological shifts is that modern societies have lost a traditional source of identity. John Reader explains in *A Sense of Place* that in the past where one was born and raised formed one's core identity.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, one's birthplace was often the same place where one worked and raised children. Therefore, one's tribe, town, or neighborhood served as a center of one's existence, a source of identity, and a context for the regular rhythms of life and faith. In our current urban trends, however, we have migrated away from a central place. We no longer find a core identity in one place, but we experience multiple places without any one place as a source of belonging. People can live in multiple places in one lifetime and find connections and identity in different places at once. Even our office buildings, modern churches, and government buildings all look the same so that the places of our lives are no longer distinct. Subway stations and airports are created as large places simply to pass through

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<sup>35</sup> Tuan, *Humanist Geography*, 99.

<sup>36</sup> John Reader, "A Sense of Place," in *Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 25.

and transport people without people having to make a connection to the place.<sup>37</sup> We live in nondescript places that do not tell us who we are.

Sigurd Bergmann aptly calls this loss of place an “existential homelessness”.<sup>38</sup> We still live in places, but those places do not particularly identify us as being at home. Without place identity we feel lost. Walter Brueggemann calls this loss of a sense of place “rootlessness” and John Inge defines the problem as “displacement”.<sup>39</sup> These words describe a sense that we no longer identify with the places in which we live. The places we live in are not as formative as they used to be. The places we live in do not reflect a spirituality or narrative. Places today carry multiple cultural identities and histories and multiple religions and systems of belief. The primary reason we need a deeper sacredness of place is because we have lost places of identity, security, and belonging.

In his work philosopher Edward S. Casey writes on place because he believes we are missing a stability of place in our current culture.<sup>40</sup> By exploiting land and creating unreflective places we are creating places of desolation. Casey characterizes desolation as barrenness or empty of life.<sup>41</sup> Desolate places lack the key components for a flourishing community. Therefore he believes that we are in a time of grieving the desolation of places as well as the absence of places in our everyday neighborhoods and cities.

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<sup>37</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day* (New York: Marlowe, 1997), 205.

<sup>38</sup> Bergmann, *Religion, Space, Environment*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), xxv; John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), xi.

<sup>40</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 109.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

Belden Lane takes this argument further. Lane argues the absence of place is a loss of particular kinds of spiritual places. Lane argues that we no longer practice an intentional attentiveness to the places we live. The places we live in are just like any other place. We are no longer rooted in place or allow place to form our identity.<sup>42</sup> In this way, places are empty of power and influence. Lane also explains that we no longer practice rituals that help us to engage and interact with the important places where we live. Thus, people are less directly involved in the practices of creating, making, building, sharing, and forming places. Therefore, we have lost a worldview where we see spirituality or meaning in the places of our lives. Through the industrial revolution places in the city became simply something to master and control.

Therefore, to recover a sacredness of place we need places to awaken our creativity in how we interact and engage with place. We need places with new properties of belonging, security, and identity. Furthermore, we need places that represent the human encounter with mystery and hope. Both desensitized built environments and displacement lead to the loss of meaning and belonging in the places where we live. In this project recognizing sacred spaces in the city is proposed as one solution to bringing back meaningful places in everyday urban built environments.

## **Exclusion**

Finally, in planning and building cities developers inevitably create boundaries that include some and exclude others. David Sibley in his book *Geographies of Exclusion* argues that the study of space is important because we need to be able to read spaces to

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<sup>42</sup> Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.

see the areas of exclusion in our towns and cities.<sup>43</sup> Anytime a building is erected it creates a spatial organization determined by ethical choices. Doreen Massey points out that we can see exclusion in our many gated communities that try to create purified spaces within the gates.<sup>44</sup> Edward Soja, an urban geographer, also argues in his work that the ways we organize space always has a consequence and makes a statement of justice or injustice.<sup>45</sup> Creating economic divides through gates and highways is just one example of the implications of urban space. Soja writes, “This deepening chasm between the rich and poor populations of the world is perhaps the most emphatic life-threatening expression of spatial injustice at a global scale.”<sup>46</sup> Planners, architects, and communities use space to particularly isolate the rich and to exclude the poor. Exclusion is a third consequence of urbanization that takes away the sacredness of place.

Part of the chaos and fear associated with cities originates from the nature of cities as intensely social spaces. Cities intensify the proximity and density of people. Therefore, the design and patterns for settlement and housing is used as a way to control the movements and organization of people.<sup>47</sup> Tuan writes, “Segmented space is a feature of advanced societies. In them, more than in simpler societies, people are encouraged to play roles.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the way cities create districts, neighborhoods, and gated communities begin to identify classes of people and suggest the roles they should take on in society. Unintentionally, then, the effort to create social order identifies some classes

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<sup>43</sup> David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 72.

<sup>44</sup> Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2005), 95.

<sup>45</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spacial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>47</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 113.

<sup>48</sup> Tuan, *Humanist Geography*, 64.

or communities of people as a threat. People become sources of fear when they live in a section of the city that is different than one's own or is unfamiliar. People also become sources of fear when they are distanced and separated in order to be identified as the "other". As cities grew more crowded there developed in city design a protection from exposure to difference. In short, the architecture and built environment of cities are built to protect humans from one another.

Yi Fu Tuan explains that social divisions in space are not just created through divided communities but also through how we categorize spaces. We create segmented spaces when we label spaces as *clean* or *dirty*, *safe* or *dangerous*. Tuan writes, "The rich and powerful not only own more real estate than the less privileged, they also command more visual space."<sup>49</sup> Therefore, there are more ways to claim space than through gates, property, or boundaries. A group or community of power can determine what we see in space, how we label spaces, and how we experience space. A space that does not respect human life in turn loses its own sacred properties. Cities naturally exclude and divide which depreciates the sacredness of human life. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, city design increasingly valued less human-to-human contact. The result of these social fears is built environments designed to exclude. This issue of spatial injustice is important because this project would be amiss if it does not acknowledge that to be a sacred space is also to be a just and ethical space.

### **From problems to possibilities**

Cities and spirituality have an estranged relationship. Generally, we do not think of cities as spiritual places. Sennett writes, "The visual forms of legibility in urban

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<sup>49</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 38.

designs or space no longer suggest much about subjective life or heal the wounds of those in need.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, cities do not often speak to the inner life. In fact, cities have exacerbated the loss of a sense of place and identity. Cities heighten isolation while also disconnecting us from the land. Cities value speed, efficiency, and density. Massive urbanization means that more and more people are crowded into high rises without a strong sense of security or belonging.

In response to these problems, this paper asks how does religion exacerbate these problems of desensitized environments, displacement, and exclusion, but also how do religious communities steward their sacred spaces and properties to create meaningful and spiritual places for the city. As the world becomes more urban the solution is not to withdraw from cities and run away to secluded spaces, but the solution is to reengage cities and create a new sense of place for displaced people living in the city. These problems ask religious communities what does it mean to be an urban church or temple? What does a religious community do with its space when the spaces of the neighborhood around it begin to change? Can a sacred space play a new role in the city? In light of these urban phenomena, how should new sacred spaces be created? To counteract desensitized environments, displacement, and exclusion the sacred spaces of the city need to encourage a greater attentiveness to place, a greater sense of belonging and identity, and a greater effort to break down social barriers.

### ***Purpose***

These unique problems of urbanization lead to the main goals of this study. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the expressions of sacred spaces in

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<sup>50</sup> Sennett, *Conscience of the Eye*, 37.



two Los Angeles neighborhoods in order to identify types of traditional and informal urban sacred spaces so that religious congregations can reengage and reimagine the role of sacred spaces in cities today. Therefore, this project will map the traditional built sacred spaces of the city and discover through mapping, interviews, and observations how new sacred spaces might be developing in the city. The end goal is to identify shared characteristics of effective sacred spaces and to encourage a more intentional approach to creating meaningful places in the city. Through this project I hope to provide a thick description of sacred spaces and the human experience of these spaces in the city. I propose that we need both formal and informal sacred spaces in order to cultivate a healthy urban spirituality. Furthermore, we need spiritual practices of place to engage with the urban built environment. By discovering the sacred spaces of the city I hope the city can be experienced as a “holy playground” where the urban ecology is equipped with meaningful and sacred places.

Despite technological advancements we still have a need for a genuine experience of place in the places in which we live. We need daily places that form and frame the purposes in which we live. We need symbolic and metaphorical places. We need places to celebrate and to mourn. We need places that speak to us. We need places that form community and identity. We need places to experience the fullness of life and not just to pass the time. Therefore, in a time when people are feeling uprooted, displaced, and homeless we need new forms and expressions of place that correspond with our ordinary routines and frequented places. We need practices of place that allow us to experience place through intricate and intimate spiritual practices. We have lost a sense of place because we have experienced places as the neutral and passive contexts in which to pass

through life. Therefore, we need to begin interacting with our homes, sanctuaries, streets, public spaces, shops and other places in order to revive our experiences of place. Most human communities do not live in large expanses of open land or in cabins in the middle of the forest. Rather, we live in complex social communities and institutional systems. We need a sacredness of place for the modern era in order to thrive in the contexts in which we live.

What are the sacred spaces of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What is our responsibility in forming sacred places? How are historical sacred spaces being repurposed into new experiences of community for the city? What do sacred spaces look like in multicultural, immigrant neighborhoods? These are a few of the questions that will be addressed through the findings of this study. As I write this project I am writing specifically to urban dwellers and particularly people of faith that live in the city either by choice or necessity. Other academics that study the city, leaders of urban churches, and practitioners that serve non-profits in the city will more readily understand the language and purposes of this study, but ultimately I want to encourage the everyday urban dweller to live intentionally. Therefore, when I use the collective “we” tense in this project I am referring to anyone living in the city. Finally, this project will produce a unique digital application of urban spirituality. Through a website that can be accessed by smartphone future participants can experience a spiritual practice by visiting the sacred spaces identified in the study and listening to the stories of spirituality in those places. Since urban is an embodied experience I desire for this project to be experienced physically as much as possible. At the same time, the digital application and case study for this project is delimited to Los Angeles and specifically to two neighborhoods at the center of the

city. Although I hope the trends found in Los Angeles may be relevant to cities around the globe, there will be many findings specific to the context. Limiting research to one city and specific neighborhoods, however, allowed the research to go more in-depth into those neighborhoods.

The next chapter will journey through the relevant literature and previous research in the study of urban sacred spaces. Chapter 3 lays out the methodology used to study space. Chapter 4 looks at the city of Los Angeles, which serves as a case study for this research. Chapter 5 uncovers the findings and analyzes the significant data that came out of this study. Chapter 6 engages in discussion with the implications of the findings and ends this study with a summary of the applications for sacred spaces in cities today and ideas for further research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Building Religion**

The study of sacred spaces falls at the intersection of several fields of knowledge. First and foremost this project seeks to understand actual, everyday practices of religion in the city. Therefore, the field of lived religion provides the vocabulary for how to observe the practices and traditions of faith. Lived religion refers to the study of the materials and practices of religion rather than the beliefs of religion. In order to understand how sacred spaces are used and why sacred spaces are important, one must learn to see the intricate web of symbols, taboos, art, rituals, liturgy, and experiences that are unavoidably part of understanding a religion. Next, this literature review looks at previous writings on the theology of sacred spaces in the city. Although this study is a phenomenological study rather than a theological inquiry, the theology of sacred spaces developed by prominent theologians and philosophers informs us on how to read and understand sacred spaces and how to interpret what we see. Furthermore, since sacred spaces are part of the built environment, developing a theology of sacred spaces helps us understand the responsibilities of a sacred space in the neighborhood around it. Finally, within the writings on a theology of sacred spaces is a collection of works that attempt to create typologies of sacred spaces. These works are a starting point for this project to help categorize and classify the types of sacred spaces found in Los Angeles.

#### ***Lived Religion***

This study is situated in the field of lived religion. The study of lived religion is the study of the traditions, materials, and practices formed from religious narratives and

doctrines.<sup>51</sup> Lived religion studies the everyday practices, experiences, and understandings of religion as experienced and interpreted by “ordinary” people in a specific culture and time. The unique perspective of lived religion is the study of religion from the actions of lay practitioners as opposed to the theology of religious leaders or clergy. This project is necessarily situated in the field of lived religion because sacred spaces contain the lived religion of a particular community. Religion, no matter how complex its theology and holy texts, is always located in particular places and experienced by particular people. Therefore, the study of sacred spaces is not simply a study of theology or history, but a study of a complex network of art, architecture, materials, symbols, rituals, liturgy, and other practices that all form a lived experience of a religious space.

There are two segments of lived religion specifically relevant to this study. The first area is the priority of phenomenology and the second area is the contributions to urban religion. Developing the study of the cultural and practiced aspects of religion as *lived religion* began to take root in the 1990’s.<sup>52</sup> Whereas anthropologists have noticed the culture of religion for a long time, lived religion needed special attention in practical theology to help religious leaders pay attention to the distinct culture of each congregation even if they share universal beliefs with other congregations around the world. In order to do this, lived religion came out of the broader study of phenomenology. Phenomenology is solely the study of experience. Phenomenology, when used in religious studies, is not concerned with religious truths, but only on how

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<sup>51</sup> Heinz Streib et al., *Lived Religion Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches: Essays in Honor of Hans-Gunter Heimbrock* (Boston: Brill, 2008), ix.

<sup>52</sup> Bergmann, *Religion, Space, Environment*, 75.

religion is experienced and what participants believe to be spiritual and meaningful.

Therefore, lived religion as the study of practiced religion necessarily incorporates the framework of phenomenology to understand how people experience and interpret their religious practices and places.

Furthermore, this project is a phenomenological study of lived religion in the city. This study will identify how people practice and experience religion in the sacred spaces of the city. Christian Norberg-Schulz explains that a phenomenology of place assumes that places have a certain character or atmosphere.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, we can study how participants experience a place and the atmosphere they feel in that place. In order to study a phenomenology of place, this study pays attention to the sense experience of places and the feelings evoked in place. Edward Casey explains, “Yet the priority of place...is descriptive and phenomenological. It is felt: felt bodily first of all. For we feel the presence of places by and in our bodies even more than we see or think or recollect them.”<sup>54</sup> Casey further explains, “As such, the body mediates between my awareness of a place and that place itself, moving me between one place and another and taking me into the intimate interstices of any given place.”<sup>55</sup> We draw from Casey’s theories, therefore, the idea that what the body experiences and feels in places of the city is a key source of knowledge that can inform the findings of this project. Colleen McDannell explains that people learn religion by imitating the practices of a religious community and engaging

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<sup>53</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, "The Phenomenon of Place," *Architectural Association Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1976): 418.

<sup>54</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 313.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

with the material dimensions of religion such as symbols, art, texts, and sacred spaces.<sup>56</sup>

We cannot truly grasp religion just from listening and reading, but we grasp religion through practices of praying, eating, worshipping, and serving together. Paying attention to lived religion reminds us that religion is not an abstract belief but is also experienced in and through our bodies. Beliefs form a system of symbols, rituals, and sacred spaces, but these materials and sacred spaces in turn form our faith system. Therefore, the foundation of lived religion in phenomenology helps to narrow the focus of this research not on what congregations believe or do, but on how they experience places in the city.

Furthermore, I want to document not only how religion is experienced but also how religion is expressed in the city. One segment of lived religion studies is to document the unique expressions of religion in urban contexts. Therefore, this section will particularly look at previous research on urban expressions of lived religion by Robert Orsi, Sigurd Bergmann, Thomas Tweed, and Isaac Weiner. Robert Orsi was one of the first writers to label *urban religion*. He writes, "Urban religion is what comes from the dynamic engagement of religious traditions with specific features of the industrial and post-industrial cityscapes and with the social conditions of city life. The results are distinctly and specifically urban forms of religious practice, experience, and understanding."<sup>57</sup> As cities develop, religious congregations in the city adapt and morph their practices in response to the changing context and in turn develop new expressions of faith that are unique urban expressions of religion. Orsi gives the example of religious processions as one religious practice created to make use of the city street. Sacred spaces

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<sup>56</sup> Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>57</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *Gods of the City Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 43.

are included in these processes of adaptation and also become entities in a wide and complex system of the urban environment.

Immigrant populations specifically play a role in transforming a city through its religious practices. Orsi writes, "...immigrant and migrants dramatically re-placed themselves on the cityscapes that had been explicitly designed to exclude them or to render them invisible or docile."<sup>58</sup> Finding themselves in an unfamiliar environment, immigrant communities modify unfamiliar structures and spaces to work for their needs and their own practices of religion. Pluralism and multiculturalism become concrete and in your face when it changes the way a city looks. Parks and open spaces are used in new ways for family celebrations. Storefronts, sidewalks, and dead end streets can be transformed into religious altars and makeshift memorials. The urban built environment influences the practicalities of what a religious community can do, but religious communities also invent new ways to use the built environment.

The following three writers not only engage with the lived aspects of religion but their own research is also located in urban contexts. Therefore their contributions add to the plethora of studies that seek to document how urban religion is taking form. Sigurd Bergmann is a theological thinker whose writings bring together the ideas of lived religion and place. It is easy to forget that religion is not just an abstract set of morals and belief statements, but religion takes place in real spaces and places. Bergmann writes, "Therefore, a study of religion and contextual theology must also develop qualitative interpretations of the spatiality of God and the spatiality of believers, their worldviews

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 41.



and values and their cultural and spiritual practices."<sup>59</sup> The spatiality of religion is a difficult concept to grasp but is an important idea for this project. Religious narratives place deities in particular places and usually with abilities to transcend space and place. At the same time, religion practiced on earth is a spatial practice that must take place in actual places and make use of the spaces and places in our homes and neighborhoods. How we use space to practice religion is what Bergmann refers to when he writes, "Lived religion takes place in lived space."<sup>60</sup> Lived religion in lived space is a motto that aptly defines the subject of this project. I seek to study how faith is practiced in urban spaces. Bergmann writes, "In the context of urban studies, such an understanding encourages us to dig deeper by investigating how city space affects the integration of religious practices and ideologies."<sup>61</sup> In other words, by recognizing religion as spatial practices with spatial narratives we are encouraged to investigate and understand how urban contexts influence our spatial practices of religion.

Bergmann writes that our experiences of the supernatural can be verbally expressed, but also visually and tactilely.<sup>62</sup> To understand religion as always taking place in lived space we need to see how communities communicate their religious beliefs in visual and other sense based ways. Bergmann proposes that religion be seen as a skill.<sup>63</sup> Bergmann specifically proposes that religion is the skill of "making oneself at home". Understanding religion as a skill will help us overcome our tendency to see religion as a

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<sup>59</sup> Bergmann, *Religion, Space, Environment*, 74.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>62</sup> Sigurd Bergmann, "Making Onself at Home in Environments of Urban Amnesia: Religion and Theology in City Space," *International Journal of Public Theology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 72.

<sup>63</sup> Bergmann, *Religion, Space, Environment*, 4.

concept rather than sets of activities. Making a home means practices of building and designing our faith in the spaces in which we live, but it also means creating a hospitable home to welcome other religious nomads in the city. Bergmann proposes three aspects of sacred spaces that form our lived religion in lived spaces: aesth/ethics, ritualization, and memory.<sup>64</sup> Aesth/ethics refers to the character of a space. In this term, Bergmann brings together the words *aesthetics* and *ethics* in order to demonstrate that our bodies make ethical decisions on what is sacred or valued.<sup>65</sup> When one walks into a space aesth/ethics is our bodily perceptions and our internal reflections working together to determine what is beautiful or valuable. Therefore, aesth/ethics will determine how we create beauty in our sacred spaces. Bergmann also writes that rituals and place work together. Rituals can turn any space into sacred space. Therefore, it's not just materials that make a space sacred but what we do as a community can turn a space into a religious center. Finally sacred spaces carry the memories and stories of a community. These memories become attached to the meaning of a sacred space and make these places personally meaningful for each member of the congregation. Together, aesth/ethics, ritual, and memories of sacred spaces carry the lived religion of a community of people.

Thomas Tweed did not begin with a theory of lived religion; instead he discovered a theory of religion from his ethnographic study of Cuban immigrants in Miami and the life surrounding a particular sacred space known as Our Lady of Charity Shrine. Therefore, through his own study of the lived religion of a particular culture of people, Tweed discovered a greater framework for studying lived religion presented in his book *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Tweed proposes that religions are

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 77.

spatial practices.<sup>66</sup> Particularly he categorizes these practices as *dwelling*s and *crossings*. Tweed writes, “Religions, in other words, involve finding one’s place and moving through space.”<sup>67</sup> Similar to Bergmann, Tweed defines the practice of dwelling in religion as a practice of homemaking.<sup>68</sup> He discovered that religious communities build, decorate, use and live in spaces and that is how a religious worldview is represented in homes and sacred spaces. We create homes and inscribe our homes with meaning. At the same time communities also practice homemaking by creating shared religious spaces that again give an overarching meaning and significance for dwelling in a particular neighborhood or city. Tweed’s theory of religion as dwelling is particularly relevant to this study because it highlights the importance of making and creating places in religion. Thus, sacred spaces are a reflection of our human desire to dwell. At the same time, despite our deep search for a rooted place, Tweed proposes that our religious practices are also a series of crossings. These can be metaphorical crossings through the stages of life and time or literal crossings through migration or weekly pilgrimages to sacred spaces.<sup>69</sup> A sacred space particularly facilitates a certain type of crossing a threshold into a sacred space. Tweed writes of religions, “They bring the gods to earth and transport the faithful to the heavens and they move horizontally, back and forth in social space.”<sup>70</sup> Religion is not simply in the heavens, but in our practices of religion we are constantly moving between the spiritual and physical. Crossings in sacred space reflect the unique element of mystery and otherworldliness in sacred space that is difficult to define.

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 73.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 158.

Tweed brings together the ideas of dwelling and crossing in the formation of devotional spaces. Tweed writes that devotional spaces are both *generated* and *generative*.<sup>71</sup> Generated space is how our body perceives space as well as the ways we create religious space through rituals and practices. Generative spaces, on the other hand, refer to the character and spirituality inherent in each place. Tweed explains that religious places “exert agency” and affect our devotional experience and practice in that space.<sup>72</sup> Each religious space has a unique spiritual atmosphere. Therefore, there is a reciprocal relationship to the practice of placemaking. Place locates our religious identity and frames our spiritual practices, but we also have authority in creating our significant places where we practice religion. Tweed’s work is especially relevant for this study because the busy movements of crossing and dwelling aptly describe city life. Tweed suggests that religion is a spatial practice of creating space.<sup>73</sup> In the city we can see the many expressions of crossing and dwelling as various religious communities and individuals enact their own expressions of creating space.

Another significant research study on lived religion and space is the work of Isaac Weiner and his study of religious sounds in the city. In his book, *Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space, and American Pluralism*, Weiner emphasizes that religion is not just a set of morals and beliefs but religion is also a set of practices. He writes, "...we find that religious pluralism has never been solely a matter of competing values, truth claims, or moral doctrines, but of different styles of public practice, of

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<sup>71</sup> S. Brent Plate, *Key Terms in Material Religion*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015). Chap. 30, Kindle.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Chap. 30.

<sup>73</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 73.

fundamentally different ways of using body and space.”<sup>74</sup> Lived religion in the city creates new dynamics of religion. Weiner’s research is particularly important because cities are pluralist religious environments where religious practices and sacred spaces can either clash with one another or exist in harmony. Cities bring religions together in close proximity, therefore sacred spaces will necessarily compete with one another. As cities grow in diversity and religious communities begin to utilize the same spaces, new questions arise about religion in the public and civic spheres of the city. Although Weiner’s work is on sound and not place, his work starts with the same foundation that physical properties of religion are just as much part of religion as holy texts or theological statements. Weiner warns his readers that the physical entities of religion, whether space or sound, will continue to ask our cities who has the power to decide which religions can have space or not.

The works of Orsi, Bergmann, Tweed, and Weiner draw from the language of lived religion and contribute to the growing area of documenting urban religion. This project seeks to contribute in the same way, but to document a different expression of urban religion. Bergmann writes, “This makes the reflexive task much more difficult as the border between sacred and nonsacred architecture no longer make any sense in an urban context where religious communities both wax and wane and where architecture and urban planning operate consciously and unconsciously with religious tools and codes.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, lived religion situated in an urban context becomes much more complex as different cultures overlap and inhabit the same spaces. It is difficult to claim

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<sup>74</sup> Isaac Weiner, *Religion out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space, and American Pluralism* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 200.

<sup>75</sup> Bergmann, *Religion, Space, Environment*, 73.

any one context as the definition of urban religion, rather studying urban spaces means recognizing it will take many different perspectives of research to piece together a bigger picture of urban religion.

### ***Theology of Sacred Spaces***

This next section looks at a rich collection of works by writers who reflect deeply on the responsibilities of a sacred space in the city. Their research responds to the urban ills of displacement, exclusion, and living in desensitized places. Philip Sheldrake, Timothy Gorringer, Edward Casey, and Yi Fu Tuan are just a few of the key scholars that engage the reflective task of what it means to build, how to build, the responsibilities of owning space, and the civic duties of being a place in the city. Architecture is generally not considered a theological endeavor, but these writers begin with the framework that in the act of building human beings have a responsibility to the earth and to fellow human beings. This responsibility requires the theological work of thinking through the ethical implications of the built environment.

Theologian Timothy Gorringer begins with the presupposition that all places carry spiritualities.<sup>76</sup> This spirituality, however, could be good or bad, positive or negative, and affirming or discouraging. He writes, “The built environment reflects not just ideologies but, ...spiritualities. Profound, creative, grace filled spiritualities produce grace filled environments; banal, impoverished, alienated spiritualities produce alienating environments.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, people of religious communities have a choice to make as to the kinds of spirituality their places offer to the city. Gorringer instructs that to discern the

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<sup>76</sup> Timothy Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency: God and the Built Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 242.

<sup>77</sup> Timothy Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24.

spirituality of a place we need to ask, “What does this place believe in?”<sup>78</sup> A sacredness of place is a place that believes in something. Gorringer argues that because postmodernism does not believe in anything, we have created neutral places without uniqueness or any particular meaning. Religious communities, on the other hand, have a responsibility to advocate for places that communicate what they believe through places that are inclusive, beautiful, and just. Gorringer writes, “...places can be healed and also...there can be healing places.”<sup>79</sup> Through Gorringer’s writings we are reminded that there is hope for cities. Places can be built and also restored with healing and belief in mind in order to create meaningful sacredness in the city. In response to Gorringer’s work I believe we live in a time where we are afraid to build belief and spirituality into the places we live. We now live in cities without a shared system of belief and thus we are afraid to engage spirituality in public places. Gorringer’s spirituality of place is a difficult but still necessary call to action.

With the establishment that places carry a spirituality and can potentially be a place of meaning, Gorringer’s primary emphasis is on a greater call to action to build not just meaningful places but ethical places. For sacred spaces, the design of the building also demonstrates the value that human beings hold in the religious tradition that owns the building. He writes, “In the built environment social relations are inscribed concretely in space.”<sup>80</sup> A building can communicate who is welcome and who is not, who has power and who is ignored. Gorringer writes, “Power is one of the most obvious meanings of

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<sup>78</sup> Gorringer, *The Common Good*, 162.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>80</sup> Gorringer, *A Theology*, 27.

space.”<sup>81</sup> Gorringer proposes how we go about using this power responsibly in the article “Salvation by Brick”.<sup>82</sup> Gorringer argues that an ethical space is a space that values human beings and respects human integrity. He writes, "Ethics is the conversation of the human race about its common project, about where it is going and how it is going to get there."<sup>83</sup> Therefore, there is a connection between our values and beliefs obtained from theology and our values reflected in the sacred spaces we build. Religious sacred spaces should be designed and built to reflect the values of redemption and healing, they should affirm equality and inclusivity, and be welcoming spaces of justice and human dignity. Gorringer’s work is largely theoretical and very idealistic. However, his call to ethical spaces is the ideal that this project is searching for in the actual spaces and places of Los Angeles.

Philip Sheldrake is another writer that has a prolific collection of works on the intersection of sacred spaces and the city. Philip Sheldrake has been working on a spirituality of the city for a long time and published his thoughts in his recent book *The Spiritual City*. He describes the city in this way, “There is no longer a centered, indeed spiritually centered, meaning for the city, merely a fragmentation into multiple activities, multiple ways of organizing time and space, matched by the multiple roles for the inhabitants.”<sup>84</sup> The multiplicity of cities makes finding sacredness in place more complex, but Sheldrake believes there is still potential for the multiplicity of places in the city to facilitate identity in place. Sheldrake writes, "If Christian spirituality concerns the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>82</sup> Timothy Gorringer, "Salvation by Brick: Theological Reflections on the Planning Process," *International Journal of Public Theology* 2 (2008): 99.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 153.



lived experience of God, as well as a vision of what assists the human spirit to achieve its fullest potential, two questions arise. Where do we locate the sacred? And where is the human spirit most truly itself?"<sup>85</sup> These are the questions we need to ask to find places of deep identity. This project holds a similar definition of spirituality in that the search for wholeness is also a search for the soul's fullest potential as Sheldrake describes.

Spirituality in this research can include a lived experience of God or another divine being, but contrary to Sheldrake's definition spirituality in this project can also include a deeper exploration of the inner self. Wholeness can be defined by a supernatural narrative and wholeness can also be understood through a greater understanding of self.

Sheldrake proposes that the solution needs to be found in multiple places just like the multiplicity of places in the city. He writes, "First, people need somewhere to pass effectively through the stages of life and reach full potential. Second, people need places to belong to a community. Third, people need cities that facilitate a fruitful relationship with the natural elements. Finally, people need environments that offer access to the sacred - or, better, relate people to life itself as sacred."<sup>86</sup> Sheldrake's categories identify that there are a variety of spaces needed in order to experience the entire urban environment as meaningful and sacred. These types of spaces include spaces that provide the resources for growth as we age, spaces with a sense of belonging, and green spaces in addition to sacred spaces. These categories correspond with the types of spaces the interviewees in this research study also identified as life-giving spaces. Sheldrake proposes that we can experience a developed sacredness of place through neighborhoods

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<sup>85</sup> Philip Sheldrake, "A Spiritual City: Urban Vision and the Christian Tradition," in *Theology in Built Environments: Exploring Religion, Architecture, and Design*, ed. Sigurd Bergmann (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 151.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 154.

that provide these basic human necessities. Sacred neighborhoods support our human needs for growth, community, nature, and spirituality. For this reason this project uses mapping as a way to see sacredness of place in the whole neighborhood. Mapping visually demonstrates our need for multiple types of meaningful spaces in the city.

Identity can be found in the personal places of home and neighborhood, but also in public spaces. Therefore, Sheldrake proposes that community and public spaces are two ways to create a spirituality of the city. Sacred space, therefore, is not just one place in the neighborhood to attend a worship service once a week. Instead, sacred spaces can be found all throughout the city. He proposes that community life and active citizenship in the public sphere are forms of spiritual practices and ways of engaging with the city.<sup>87</sup> Public spaces are not just places to pass through but they need to invite us to “dwell and belong”.<sup>88</sup> To truly recover sacredness in place we need public places that invite us to stay longer and to connect us with other people. Therefore, Sheldrake matches the complexities of the city with the complexities of relationships. Through involvement, interaction, and connection we can experience the city as a “true place”. Sheldrake proposes that our sacred spaces and religious buildings need to be the first new forms of public spaces. Our sacred spaces should be the first to be open to the public, to affirm the sacredness of life, and to invite people to dwell.

Philip Sheldrake uses sacramental theology as a framework for building sacred spaces that not only facilitate a divine human interaction but also creates a welcoming and ethical space for the community. Sheldrake writes, "A sacramental sensibility

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<sup>87</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality, and the Urban* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 10.

<sup>88</sup> Sheldrake, "A Spiritual City," 164.

understands the divine to be accessible through the human, the universal through the particular, the transcendent through the contingent, the spiritual through the material, the ultimate through the historical."<sup>89</sup> Therefore, if one holds a sacramental theology, then place is important for accessing God. Human beings need a place to connect with sacred realities and to engage with God through materials. Sacramental spaces are designed to direct us to those places that can mediate a relationship between God and human beings.<sup>90</sup> Especially in a world of displaced and marginalized peoples a sacramental space is also a space of welcome and reconciliation.

John Inge proposes a similar Christian framework in his book *A Christian Theology of Place*. John Inge uses the Christian narrative framework that God comes to us in sacramental events.<sup>91</sup> The incarnation, specifically, is a sacramental event that demonstrates the importance of place because in the incarnation God comes to us in place. Places are important because God chooses to reveal himself to us in place. Places are important because God chooses to continually meet us in place. Therefore, Inge proposes a sacramental approach in the relationship between people, place and God. A sacrament requires that God initiate by revealing himself to us. A sacrament also requires that humans respond to God with practices of gratitude and remembrance. Finally, a sacrament requires a place of occurrence where God and humanity meets. A sacramental approach to place highlights the holiness of the everyday places in which we live.

The image of a sacrament is particularly helpful for sacred spaces in forming a three-way relationship between people, place and God. Our practices and actions in place

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<sup>89</sup> Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 71.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>91</sup> John Inge, "Towards a Theology of Place," *Modern Believing* 40, no. 1 (1999): 46.

are also highlighted in a sacramental view because our practices are our responses to the supernatural. The drawback of a sacramental approach is that it becomes easy to view some places as more sacred than others. Inge believes, however, that encountering God through sacramental places will also put us in the posture to see God act in all places. Sacramental places remind us that God can appear in any place. Therefore, a sacramental perspective of place expects and waits for the holy in all places. Inge's proposal that all places are potentially sacred opens up the possibility for informal sacred spaces that is studied in this project.

From a sacramental perspective, then, Sheldrake and Inge argue that a sacred space where the Eucharist is practiced should also be a space where no one is excluded and many voices are heard. Sheldrake writes, "Most of all, a space of reconciliation invites all who enter to make space for the other, to move over religiously or socially, to make room for those who are unlike, and in that process to realize that everyone has become something different." Even though Sheldrake's concept revolves around the specific practice of communion, he emphasizes in his theology that communion is one place where the community meets. The sacrality of communion and the sacred space are both involved in creating an environment that facilitates the social and ethical pursuit of reconciliation. Sheldrake argues that every place contains *multilocalities* and *multivocalities*.<sup>92</sup> The multilocalities of a place mean that each place can hold a different meaning for different communities of people. The multivocalities of place means that each place holds the different voices that speak on behalf of that place. Sheldrake argues, "...we have to reconstruct what might be called a "narrative beyond easy narrative" if

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<sup>92</sup> Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 21.

space is to be made for those whose stories have not been heard.”<sup>93</sup> In order for the Eucharist space to be an ethical reconciling space it must be a space where every voice and every story is heard. As Sheldrake indicates in this quote this is not an easy task, but this task requires the overall narrative of the sacred space to be one that is open to other narratives. This task of creating a reconciling narrative is an intentional effort when creating our mental concepts of sacred space as well as our physical experiences of sacred space.

These theologies of sacred spaces by Gorringer, Sheldrake and Inge present a framework and ideal for how a religious community might think about their sacred spaces. They recognize the value and responsibilities of traditional sacred architecture, but their definitions of sacred spaces also open up the possibilities for any and all places in a neighborhood to be potentially sacred for the people that call that neighborhood home. The next two scholars, Edward Casey and Yi Fu Tuan, look at spaces from a philosophical and geography lens but also present an ideal for building meaningful spaces that can become sacred to a community. Although this current project highlights lived and actual places, the study of place begins with a process of conscious and deep theoretical reflection on place and how places form us.

Casey writes that to dwell in place is both an experience of the body as well as the act of building.<sup>94</sup> Places can be created, changed, reformed, or erased. Therefore, through the act of building we can also intentionally create formative and meaningful places. To build reflective places Casey argues that we need to reflect on the natural environment of the places we build. Places should not cover over or dismiss the natural places we have

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>94</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 116.

been given, but places should respect and incorporate its natural environment. Reflective places also pay attention to both the inside and the outside of the places we build.

Therefore, by building places we are also creating meaningful spaces. Casey highlights the reflective process of building places when he writes, “To cultivate its interior we must cultivate our interior; it is a matter of letting one interior speak to another.”<sup>95</sup> When we personalize a room or a home, for example, we are expressing an interior feeling and also creating how others will embody the place. Places can express our inner thoughts and spirituality.

To build and create meaningful places Casey suggests two helpful concepts of atmospheres and thick places. Every place contains an atmosphere.<sup>96</sup> The atmosphere is experienced like the feeling or emotion of a place. We experience the atmosphere of a place by reflecting on our own emotions. Atmospheres of places are not necessarily visible, but they are felt through a synthesized experience of all the senses, mind, and emotions processing place together. Atmospheres of place could be described by adjectives like warm or cold, intimate or impersonal, and cheerful or depressing. Atmospheres then influence our emotions, just as our emotions are reflected into how we perceive atmospheres. Although every place contains an intentional or unintentional atmosphere, we also take part in creating atmospheres. Atmosphere is created by design and decoration, but atmosphere is also created by how humans are interacting in places. Without intentional atmospheres in place Casey says that places are “thinned-out”.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>97</sup> Edward S. Casey, "Body, Self and Landscape: A Geophilosophical Inquiry into the Place-World," in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, ed. Paul C. Adams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 408.

When places lose meaning, when we build places that are monotonous and when we no longer pay attention to place, these are ways that places become thin. When places do not carry significant memories or stories they become thin.

The opposite of thinned-out places, then, are thick places. Thick places are the places where we experience the richness of life and grow as human beings. Thick places are the place that we might describe as a place of character. Human cultures need thick places to thrive. Thick places encourage social interaction and creating good memories. This project uses Casey's idea of thick places to qualitatively describe effective sacred spaces and to bring out the characteristics that make a sacred space a "thick place". Second, this project seeks to recommend ways of changing the atmosphere of places to create "thick sacred spaces."

We turn now to the work of Yi Fu Tuan. Tuan writes about many areas of geography, but self-identifies as a humanist geographer. Therefore, he pursues in his writings questions of what it means to be humans dwelling on earth. His pursuit, however, leads him to also write extensively on the topics of urban geography and the geography of religions. Tuan provides in his research and writings insightful ideas on what it means to create thick places in homes, cities, and particularly through religious places.

Since human beings are attached to places, we are constantly interacting with place and we engage in the act of building places.<sup>98</sup> To interact with place is to interact with material dimensions both natural and materials created by human production. Building places is the act of adapting materials into enclosed shelters. Tuan expresses that

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<sup>98</sup> Tuan, *Topophilia*, 93.

although other creatures of the earth also build places, humans are unique in that we also have the ability to imagine places. Thus, we have the field of architecture devoted to imagining and designing places.<sup>99</sup> Tuan states that architecture is a spiritual experience because it engages our ability to imagine and to design emotions into built environments.

Therefore, to build place Tuan states that we need to incorporate sense experiences like tactile and visual materials and we also need to consider feelings created in space and place. Similar to Casey's idea of atmospheres, Tuan encourages that we build places that demonstrate complex emotions.<sup>100</sup> First, when we build we create the notions of inside and outside. Inside and outside will create different emotional experiences experienced as intimacy or exposure, private or public.<sup>101</sup> Tuan writes that smaller interiors feel more intimate because more of our senses are engaged in the experience of a small place.<sup>102</sup> Intimate places symbolize for human beings the comfort of nurture and where our primary needs are met. In places outside the home, we experience other emotions and dimensions of place. In speaking of a cathedral, Tuan writes that we respond to the height and depth and the movements of light.<sup>103</sup> Our body responds to these experiences and creates sensations of awe and devotion. The feelings of place are also attached to cultural values and moral judgments. For example, we may associate a new place as being clean and of greater worth, while an old place is seen as

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<sup>99</sup> Tuan, *Humanist Geography*, 97.

<sup>100</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>102</sup> Tuan, *Humanist Geography*, 27.

<sup>103</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 116.



dirty and not valuable to the community.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, creating emotions, spirituality, and meaning in place is a complex cultural project.

Tuan writes that in some ways we are more comfortable with places built by human hands than the unknown places of nature. Built places are familiar and controllable. Built places are not only intimate places of shelter, but places in the community teach us social values and how to behave in place.<sup>105</sup> Places define social roles and relationships between neighbors and people in the community. Places can also communicate the principles of citizenship. In short, built places are designed to tell us who we are as human beings. Human beings need different kinds of places in order to thrive. Our most basic need is a need for shelter. Tuan uses the term hearth to describe our need for a warm and intimate place of protection.<sup>106</sup> After shelter then we need communal places. We need neighbors and neighborhoods. The home is also a communal place that provides a place for families. Finally, Tuan writes that human beings are also political beings.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, we also need places of citizenship that tie us to city and nation. Places of citizenship also include places of work and places to connect with the economy. Tuan notes that passion for a nation or homeland is found all over the world and therefore confirms that citizenship is also a common human need.<sup>108</sup> There is a point, however, in the spectrum from home to homeland that place becomes conceptual rather than felt. Tuan explains that the street is the limit where we experience community

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<sup>104</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture* (Washington, DC: Shearwater Books, 1993), 152.

<sup>105</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 102.

<sup>106</sup> Tuan, "Sense of Place," 51.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>108</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 154.

through sense perception.<sup>109</sup> Otherwise, places like neighborhood, town, city and nation are abstract conceptions of place.

To be clear Tuan does not write in the field of religion, rather he writes as a geographer. He looks at religion and sacred places specifically through the lens of how religion interacts with the earth, the practice of dwelling, and the act of building space and place. Religion and religious places communicate stories and answers to the questions of why we are placed in space and why we need to create places. Tuan explains that power defines a sacred space. When a place is given the characteristic of holy it gains a social power that distinguishes the place from the spaces and places around it.<sup>110</sup> Sadly, in modern cities there is a growing disconnect between religion and geography. Cities do not communicate a greater narrative or meaning of life. Our buildings no longer communicate beliefs of cosmic order or symbols of ultimate significance beyond our current place. Tuan states that one reason for this is that religious architecture has shifted from an external expression into an internal experience. He writes that we have moved rituals indoors.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, our sacred places in the city are no longer seen or felt in city spaces. Rather, we have made religion private and conceptual rather than public and physically experienced.

Tuan sees how religion is a spatial practice of creating places and using spaces. But he appropriately identifies that ultimately religions desire to be free from the restrictions of place and space. Therefore, religion, space, and place have a fickle

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>110</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, "Sacred Space: Explorations of an Idea," in *Dimensions of Human Geography: Essays on Some Familiar and Neglected Themes*, ed. Karl W. Butzer (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1978), 85.

<sup>111</sup> Tuan, *Romantic Geography*, 17.

relationship. Human cultures can only practice religion in place and space, but religions inspire human beings to imagine places and spaces that do not exist on this earth.

Although these writers do not often engage in the fieldwork of studying actual places in the city, they create a framework for this project on what to look for in meaningful and sacred spaces. The theological reflections of Gorringer, Sheldrake, and Inge remind us that truly sacred places in the city need to reflect beliefs and reconciliation. Sheldrake reminds us that the city is a whole system that needs to thrive in order for the population to thrive. Edwards and Tuan guide us through philosophical reflections on our human need for thick places that communicate complex emotions and ideas. This project attempts to take the reflections of Gorringer, Sheldrake, Inge, Edwards, and Tuan and use them as a lens to look at actual places in the city.

### ***Typologies of Sacred Spaces***

Nancy Ammerman writes in *Studying Congregations* that “An inventory of sacred space can become an important ingredient in reimagining what is possible, as well as a reminder of what is necessary for sustaining the work to which the congregation is committed.”<sup>112</sup> Inventory is a fitting word to describe the end result of this study. A qualitative study of sacred spaces in the city not just reveals the human experience of each space, but also the variety of sacred spaces in the city and the characteristics for effective spaces. Several researchers have already begun the work of categorizing types of sacred spaces in the city. For many of these researchers, typologies of sacred space is not their main area of focus but just one of their outcomes in looking at sacred spaces in the city.

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<sup>112</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 158.

Lindsay Jones is one of few scholars whose main focus is on classifying the architecture of Western sacred spaces. Particularly relevant to this study is Lindsay Jones' categories of sacred architecture based on rituals in his second volume of *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*. In Jones' four types it is the practice that forms the design.<sup>113</sup> The first type of ritual space is a theater space. This type of sacred space is also known as an auditorium that is built or adapted specifically for performance. Many evangelical churches use a theater space that highlights the performances of worship and teaching. The next type of sacred space is contemplative spaces. In this type the space or place itself becomes an object of gaze and maybe even part of the ritual. Participants may engage with different altars built for prayer or meditate on designs built into the temple or cathedral. The third type of sacred space is propitiation. Propitiation is the act of building a sacred space. The process of building becomes a holy practice. In urban contexts roadside shrines and murals can become propitiation spaces. The last type of ritual space is sanctuary space intended to help one retreat from the outside world. In an urban context, a garden or pathway intended to direct people away from the busyness of the city can be seen as a sanctuary space. Lindsay Jones does not consider context in his typologies of sacred spaces. Therefore, these four categories do not specifically describe urban spaces. His work, however, gives a basic foundation for common types of Western sacred spaces.

Richard Kieckhefer in this book *Theology in Stone* presents three types of sacred spaces that overlap with Jones' categories but also further distinguishes types of meeting

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<sup>113</sup> Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 185.

spaces.<sup>114</sup> Kieckhefer also identifies the theater or auditorium space that is created for watching. He identifies that these spaces value the practices of proclamation and scripture. Jeane Kilde writes that these classic auditorium churches later added in Sunday school rooms and kitchens to facilitate community for growing families.<sup>115</sup> Kieckhefer distinguishes the auditorium from what he calls sacramental churches. A sacramental church usually has a long center aisle as a main focus and is used for processions. These types of spaces tend to have high liturgical traditions. Finally, Kieckhefer identified that many modern churches are designed for community gatherings. These spaces tend to be smaller and more intimate rather than grand and awe-inspiring.

Professor Katie Day takes the typology of sacred spaces even further in her work that is similar to this current project. Rather than focusing on neighborhoods in her city, Day picked one street in Philadelphia and studied the sacred spaces that inhabit the spaces along this major urban thoroughfare. This street led Day through several neighborhoods in her city. Therefore, Day's project is similar to this current project in that Day incorporated the tool of mapping. Day's study, however, still focused on ethnographic studies of congregations along the street rather than a study focused on space and experiences of space. In Day's study, however, she also found three main categories of sacred spaces that are helpful to this current study. In her book, *Faith on the Avenue* Day found three main types of churches in her urban context.<sup>116</sup> The first type Day calls historic churches. These spaces are congregations that continue to use the

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<sup>114</sup> Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 22.

<sup>115</sup> Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 158.

<sup>116</sup> Katie Day and Edd Conboy, *Faith on the Avenue: Religion on a City Street* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31.

building they originally built. The second type of space Day calls *Hermit Crabs*. These congregations took over a religious building from a previous congregation that moved away, outgrew the space, or closed. The last type of space Day found she calls *recyclers*. These are congregations that have adapted commercial or residential properties like office buildings and empty stores to use as sacred spaces. These three types of sacred spaces that Day discovered in Philadelphia are common types of congregations in cities around the world. Like Day's research, this project will use an urban ecology framework to look at sacred spaces in the city. This framework means looking at sacred spaces as an entity in the greater context of street, neighborhood, and city. Day writes that each congregation has agency or interaction and influence in its context.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, the sacred spaces on one street in the city are part of an active urban ecology. A main difference between Day's research and this project, however, is that Day narrowed her research on sacred spaces to congregations. Therefore, to be classified as a sacred space in her study a congregation had to meet regularly in a particular space. This current project, however, also considers informal sacred spaces that may not have a formal organization.

Richard Cimino adds three additional types of urban sacred spaces in the collaborative work *Ecologies of Faith in New York City*. This book provides snapshots of urban religion specifically expressed in New York City. Cimino identifies *Lifestyle enclaves* as new religious communities created to reach a new population in the neighborhood. He writes lifestyle enclaves "...are congregations most obviously shaped by gentrification, founded to minister to the neighborhood with a special focus on new

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 12.

residents.”<sup>118</sup> Another common urban congregation Cimino calls *social-center congregations*. These sacred spaces often have a “historic presence in the neighborhood” and engage in community activism and support services.<sup>119</sup> Finally, Cimino identifies many congregations in the city as *ethnic enclaves* intended to serve a particular ethnic group in their native language.

The types of sacred spaces identified by Jones, Kieckhefer, Day, and Cimino begin a system of labels and terms that can be used to study the variety of sacred spaces in the city. Jones and Kieckhefer focused on traditional western sacred spaces and found spaces of contemplation, theater, sanctuary, procession, propitiation, and community gathering. Day and Cimino particularly looked at urban contexts and found additional expressions of sacred spaces found in hermit crabs, recyclers, lifestyle enclaves, social centers, and ethnic enclaves. I will use the same vocabulary as these authors later to describe the findings of this project whenever I found similar types of spaces in Los Angeles.

The next few collections of work look at researchers that particularly looked at types of sacred spaces in Los Angeles. Photographers in particular have done the tedious work of cataloging expressions of religion in Los Angeles. Matt Gainer in his work *Looking for God in the City of Angels* attempts to capture the diversity of religious expressions that can be found in Los Angeles by visiting and photographing

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<sup>118</sup> Richard P. Cimino, Nadia A. Mian, and Weishan Huang, *Ecologies of Faith in New York City the Evolution of Religious Institutions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 64.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

congregations throughout Los Angeles.<sup>120</sup> Even though his focus is on art and not religious studies he took a similar approach as this project. By capturing individual expressions of religious congregations each picture brought together creates a web that shows a bigger picture of religion in Los Angeles. Gainer found that religion in Los Angeles is diverse not only in ethnicity and language, but in religious beliefs. Gainer observed, “Among the subjective curiosities that guided my path were the number of transformed spaces being used for worship throughout Los Angeles – warehouses, movie theatres, suburban homes, small storefronts – spaces that suggested an urgency to find room to congregate.”<sup>121</sup> Gainer’s discoveries imply that there can be many more types of sacred spaces taking form and finding space in cities today. The work of photographer Kevin McCollister is another example of a sacred spaces project in Los Angeles. McCollister has spent the last nine years photographing storefront churches in Los Angeles.<sup>122</sup> He defines storefront churches in this way, “Quiet during business hours, these churches come alive in the evenings, often heard before they are seen.” McCollister’s collection overlaps with this current project as storefront churches are just one type of sacred spaces discovered in this project.

While preparing for and conducting this study the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California began a similar mapping project. They are also attempting to map the sacred spaces of Los Angeles. They have found, similar to

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<sup>120</sup> Matt Gainer, "Contemporary Voice: Looking for God in the City of Angels", in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, ed. William Devereil and Greg Hise (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>122</sup> Kevin McCollister, "The Inviting Light of L.A.'S Humble, One-Room Churches," *Zocalo* (2015), accessed January 16, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20170116230342/http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2015/03/24/the-inviting-light-of-l-a-s-humble-one-room-churches/viewings/glimpses/>.



Gainer and McCollister, a wide diversity of religious expressions and sacred spaces. In their research of Los Feliz they found “Far from being vitiated by the overall religious disaffiliation trend evident in the United States, religion in Southern California is being revitalized by it, as religious “nones” create new forms of purposeful community and spark innovation among groups that may have never before experimented with rituals, worship styles, or modes of organization.”<sup>123</sup> Again, this research by the Center for Religion and Civic Culture conducts ethnographic studies of the congregations they are mapping. They have not focused as much on the sacred spaces themselves or the experiences of places in the neighborhood as this current study seeks to study. Nevertheless, they have similarly found mapping as an apt tool for understanding expressions of urban religion in Los Angeles.

Intentionally missing from this literature review is the field of architecture. Architecture and city planning play a large role in the design and building of sacred spaces. At the same time, thinkers in architecture carry a specialty and technical language that the typical urban dweller likely does not understand. For this reason, this literature review neglects the voices on sacred spaces from an architectural viewpoint precisely to emphasize that sacred spaces are relevant to religious studies. Sacred spaces are an integral part of expressions in lived religion and particularly urban religion. Furthermore, how we use space and create space is an ethical concern in addition to a theological concern. Finally, sacred spaces in all types and forms are an integral part to the cityscape

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<sup>123</sup> Richard W. Flory et al., "Mapping the New Landscape of Religion in Los Feliz," *BOOM: A Journal of California* 5, no. 4 (2016): 38, accessed January 16, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20170116230157/http://crcc.usc.edu/mapping-the-new-landscape-of-religion-in-los-feliz/>.

and are an essential part to what it means to practice and experience spirituality in the city.

## Chapter 3

### How to Study Space

The methodology for this project differs considerably from traditional religious studies research. In order to study space this project uses an urban planning lens to look at sacred spaces in the context of the city. Moreover, since places are experienced through the body this project also incorporates sensory methodologies to better capture how places are experienced. A drawback of such an approach is the loss of an in-depth ethnography of the specific congregations mentioned in the study. On the other hand, by using non-traditional methods for religious studies I hope that new types of data can be gathered on urban religion that is qualitatively different than a traditional ethnography. The three main research methods used in this study are mapping, interviews through walking and cognitive mapping, and direct observations of spaces identified in the interviews. These three methods will gather a triangulation of data that will overlap as well as inform one another.

In order to understand the importance of mapping, one must first be able to see the city as an urban ecology. To view the city as an urban ecology is to see the city as a complex system of populations, industries, government, transportation, and many other dynamics that influence and interact with one another. The urban ecology is a habitat that must be understood in order for human communities and religious congregations to survive and thrive. A religious perspective on an urban ecology is particularly developed through the work of Nancy Ammerman and Katie Day. Ammerman states that theology begins when a religious congregation decides where it will be located.<sup>124</sup> From that point

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<sup>124</sup> Ammerman, *Studying Congregations*, 26.

on the congregation begins to interact with the neighborhood and city around it.

Ammerman writes, "To use an ecological frame is to see the congregation as an organism in an environment in which there are many other organisms that together make up the social and religious world."<sup>125</sup> Each congregation brings a particular culture to the neighborhood and they contribute power and resources. Katie Day's work as mentioned earlier is one example of religious research that uses an ecological framework. Day conducted ethnographies of congregations that all align a single street in the city of Philadelphia. This street runs through several different neighborhoods in the city and her ethnographic work gives a good overall picture of urban religion in Philadelphia. Day emphasizes that every congregation has agency.<sup>126</sup> By this term she means that each congregation cannot be neutral to the urban ecology around it, rather every congregation makes choices that affect the city and contribute to the life of the city both positively and negatively. At the same time, the characteristics of the city also contribute to the culture of each congregation. Day's research particularly found that religious congregations help urban communities generate bonding and bridging social capital that not only aids the congregation members but also those they interact with throughout the week.<sup>127</sup> A key difference between Day's work and this current study, however, is rather than studying sacred spaces by looking at the people in each congregation this study will study sacred spaces by studying the spaces they use. Looking at the city and sacred spaces from an urban ecological frame reveals how sacred spaces are part of the larger city and the larger experience of living in the city.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>126</sup> Day and Conboy, *Faith on the Avenue*, 12.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 26.

## ***Mapping***

I began this study with a reconnaissance map of the traditional sacred spaces in the neighborhoods of Downtown and Westlake/Echo Park/Pico Union, Los Angeles. I visited each sacred space in these neighborhoods that could be visibly identified and recorded them on a digital map. When possible I visited and participated in the activities of the sacred space and congregation. This initial mapping reveals typologies of sacred spaces that already exist in the city. Mapping also provides quantitative data for the number of each type of sacred space in the city. Finally, mapping reveals the spatial layout of sacred spaces in the city. One can get a visual representation of the proximity and distance of sacred spaces in relation to one another and to other places in the city.

## ***Interviews: Cognitive Mapping and Walking***

Next, I interviewed 20 people that live or work in the two neighborhoods studied. The interviews took about 90 minutes each. Two sets of couples were interviewed together and thus their interviews took 2-3 hours. Each interview had to take place in the neighborhood where the participants lived or worked. 3 interviews took place in the participant's home. 5 interviews took place at a local restaurant or coffee shop. 12 interviews took place in the sacred space or non-profit where the participant works. The interviews were sound recorded. The interviews started with introduction questions that asked interview participants how they came to be in this neighborhood, how they found a place to live, and the changes they have seen in the neighborhood in the time they have lived there. A list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The majority of the interview time, however, utilized visual tools to facilitate and guide the interviews. Jennie Middleton writes in her article "Sense and the City" that "It

is proposed as methodologically and analytically troubling that 'talk is made to stand in for all the complexities and subtleties of embodied practice.'<sup>128</sup> Place is a sense experience, so this research sought to incorporate that experience into the interviews and research methodology. Therefore, visual research methods intentionally gather visual data to more fully capture lived practices. In her article Karin Hannes explains that visual data can be two-dimensional such as maps and photographs or three-dimensional like videos and spaces.<sup>129</sup> By using the two methods of cognitive mapping and walking I tried to capture a range of visual and sensual data in the interviews.

In the first half of each interview, in addition to traditional interview questions, participants were asked to draw a map of their neighborhood. The maps created by each participant added additional layers to the map collected by the researcher. The maps also identify various types of urban sacred spaces that exist in each neighborhood. Kimberly Powell does significant work in developing the methodology of mapping through her own research. In her article "Making Sense of Place" Powell states, "I address mapping as a particularly powerful mode of visual research that offers a means to (re)present place as lived and embodied."<sup>130</sup> She explains that maps help draw out stories of places as well as how people grasp a sense of space and their built environment. Mapping also draws out the meaning that participants construct from the places in their lives. Powell concludes that mapping helps researchers and participants to verbalize and visualize the

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<sup>128</sup> Jennie Middleton, "Sense and the City: Exploring the Embodied Geographies of Urban Walking," *Social & Cultural Geography* 11, no. 6 (2010): 580.

<sup>129</sup> Karin Hannes and Oksana Parylo, "Let's Play It Safe: Ethical Considerations from Participants in a Photovoice Research Project," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 13 (2014): 256.

<sup>130</sup> Kimberly Powell, "Making Sense of Place: Mapping as a Multisensory Research Method," *Qualitative Inquiry* 16 (2010): 539.

relationships between person and place.<sup>131</sup> Thus mapping is an apt tool to capture the full range of experiences in the practice of lived religion. Buttimer and Seamon in *The Human Experience of Space and Place* detail the type of data that can be gathered through cognitive mapping.<sup>132</sup> They explain that each research participant has a network of places they go to, spaces where they interact, as well as areas they avoid. The routes they take and the places they stop are all data that can be collected through mapping that explain people's relationship to the city and what they find meaningful. Furthermore, what is drawn big or small, close or far are all clues to the meaning that each participant finds in the places they choose to list on their map. Maps highlight visually what spaces stand out and why.

There were two primary questions that directed the cognitive mapping. Judging by how much the participants talked during the first few questions of the interview, some received two steps for mapping and others received one. For those that needed more prompting and questions, they were first asked to map the places in their neighborhood where they might go to in a typical week or month. In the second step of mapping they were asked to identify the sacred spaces in their neighborhood. For interview participants who spoke much without much prompting, they were directly asked to map the sacred spaces in their neighborhood. Participants were given a large pad of paper and a choice of pencil, black markers, or colored pens. During the mapping activity, the researcher took note of how each participant started their map. Did they begin with a grid of streets or did they begin by marking places in their neighborhood? The researcher also took note of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 553.

<sup>132</sup> Anne Buttimer and David Seamon, *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 27.

those that talked as they mapped or those that mapped silently. After mapping, the research participants were asked to talk about the sacred spaces on their map. They were asked what sacred spaces were personal sacred spaces and why? They were asked what sacred spaces were sacred to their neighborhood and community and why? The term “sacred space” was not defined for the participants, instead the term was left to each participant to interpret on their own. Participants continued to add places to their map as they talked and thought of new places. Finally, participants were asked what places in their neighborhood visually represent their community and what sacred spaces they think are missing or needed for their community. In these questions, the researcher tried to encourage participants to share stories about these places in their neighborhood.

In the second half of the interview, participants were asked to take the researcher on a walk to a sacred space they commonly visit and to walk the route they usually walk. Nancy Ammerman writes that the members of religious congregations create a network map based on their patterns of movement in the city throughout the week.<sup>133</sup> Walking is a unique visual ethnographic interview method that allows the researcher to share in the lived experience of the urban setting along with the participant and to embody what the participant embodies. Walking allows the researcher to also become a participant. The researcher experiences the city along with the participant and experiences the same sense stimuli.

Since urban is an embodied experience, an embodied methodology is needed to fully understand what urban means. Walking brings out the physical experiences and sense experiences when walking around the city. Walking is also an invitation to tell

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<sup>133</sup> Ammerman, *Studying Congregations*, 51.



stories about places as the participant and researcher walk pass.<sup>134</sup> Sarah Pink explains in her book *Doing Sensory Ethnography* that walking “...allows research participants to use their whole bodies and senses to touch, show, smell and verbalize what is important to them about the environments they make and inhabit.”<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, these sense experiences will guide the direction of the interview. A sudden sound or walking passed certain smells could suddenly change the topic of conversation.

After creating a map of the neighborhood, the researcher and participant decided on a sacred space to walk to together. In a few cases in which the interview took place in a sacred space, the walking activity was a tour of the facility rather than a walk outside. Before starting the walk the participants were wired with a mic in order to continue the sound recording of the interview. As we walked the participants were asked about the positive and negative forces they see in the neighborhood. In order to encourage more observations, they were also asked what they liked or disliked about the neighborhood. Finally, when the participant and researcher arrived at their predetermined sacred space they talked about the features of the space that made it sacred. The walking methodology created an atmosphere to talk about the city while walking through the city and reminded the participants of the things they experience daily that they may not think about intentionally.

### ***Direct Observations***

In the final step of data collecting the researcher selected fifteen places that were identified in the interviews as sacred spaces. The researcher then conducted direct observations of each place using urban planning methodology. Urban planning

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>135</sup> Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 130.

methodology greatly influenced this project and allowed the researcher to approach a religious studies subject matter from a different perspective. Mapping, cognitive mapping, walking, and direct observations of space are all common urban planning methodologies that have only recently been utilized in religious studies methodology. By using an urban planning lens one can incorporate the values of urban planning to imagine new ways of creating vibrant spaces in the city. Urban planning values help direct the framework for this methodology for what characteristics to observe in identifying effective sacred spaces.

To conduct direct observations the researcher first created a standard comparison chart in which to observe and evaluate each of the twenty sacred spaces. The comparison chart can be found in Appendix B of this paper. The researcher spent between thirty minutes to one hour in each space to record the characteristics of each space and to observe how the space is used. Each space was viewed like a different habitat with a variety of key features and different populations that utilize the space. Direct observation revealed the life of the space.

Jan Gehl's book *How to Study Public Life* explains how the direct observation of spaces can help identify the characteristics that make a space effective.<sup>136</sup> Observation requires the manual work of taking notes and using one's senses to observe. Direct observation is guided by the four main questions of who uses the space, where do people tend to linger, what do they do in the space and how long do they stay. Therefore, some of the criteria used for observations and comparison of sacred spaces included features built into the space such as the prevalence of shade or sun, a design that is open to the

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<sup>136</sup> Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre, *How to Study Public Life* (Washington, DC: IslandPress, 2013), 3.

street or closed off from the street, art, and key features that give the space meaning. Other criteria included how people used the space. The researcher recorded who owned the space, what people did in the space, how much time they spent there, and what type of people used the space. These notes were then compared with one another to find common patterns and themes in these sacred spaces.

The researcher began conducting research in May 2016 and continued the research and observations through February 2017. The data collected for analysis included the researcher's own reconnaissance map, written materials collected from congregations in the city, interview transcripts, the maps created by research participants, and notes from observing spaces identified in the interviews. Together this data helped formed the pieces to present qualitative data on sacred spaces as thick places and to reveal common themes of effective sacred spaces.

### ***Digital Map***

The final piece of this project is a digital map that maps sacred spaces of downtown and Westlake/Echo Park/Pico Union, Los Angeles. The website not only features images and descriptions of each sacred space but also includes audio clips of the participants as they speak about a sacred space in the city. This website is a practical and public application of the research data. This website also allows people in the city to listen to stories associated with sacred spaces in Los Angeles and either visit the place or see photographs of the place. The map also provides examples of various types of urban sacred spaces that exist in each neighborhood. The website is a practical tool for religious congregations or urban immersion courses to experience downtown and Westlake/Echo Park/Pico Union, Los Angeles and for members of each participating congregation to

engage in prayer walking through the city. The website is also intended to be a new experience of urban spirituality that utilizes digital media. Through a smartphone the website can be experienced in actual neighborhoods and allows participants to listen to stories of urban spirituality in place.

### ***Ethical Concerns in Sensory Methodology***

With using nontraditional research methods there are new ethical concerns specifically associated with visual and sensory research methods. Taking photos, for example, place individuals in a vulnerable place in which they can be recognized. In this project, a short 1 to 4 minute sound clip of each interview is made public through placing them on a digital map on the Internet. By making the sound clips public the research participants lose anonymity and confidentiality. Hannes and Parylo write, "Furthermore, the traditional means used by researchers to protect research participants have been judged inadequate, mainly because visual data are more difficult to anonymise than textual data."<sup>137</sup> New ethical concerns, however, is not reason enough to not use sensory methodologies because we would lose out on valuable research and findings. Instead, new ethical concerns require new responses in order to protect participants.

On the website participants were identified by their first name. Therefore, their sound clip is not anonymous. Consequently, efforts were made not to anonymise but to receive consent. In order to address these ethical concerns, participants were notified before they agreed to participate in the study that the interviews would be recorded and a portion of it would be made available on the Internet. An additional consent form was also used to request permission to release a sound clip from the interview. Furthermore,

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<sup>137</sup> Hannes and Parylo, "Let's Play It Safe," 256.

after the researcher edited and chose the sound clip the research participant was consulted again to obtain their final approval and permission. This gave the participants the final say and choice to edit, release, or withdraw the sound clip. Other than a short sound clip, the remainder of the interview was secured and kept anonymous. Furthermore, a walking methodology created certain safety concerns so participants were given the option to not walk and to extend the sit down interview. A copy of the informed consent form can be found in Appendix C of this paper.

An additional ethical concern in selecting the interviewees is who gets to speak on behalf of the neighborhood. Most of the interviewees were selected because they are known as leaders in the neighborhood or because their occupation requires them to serve the neighborhood in some capacity. These interviewees were selected because they know their neighborhoods well and have spent time reflecting on the conditions of their neighborhood. Radically missing from this method of selection, however, are the voices of a “typical” resident of the neighborhood rather than an “expert” of the neighborhood. Nevertheless, with the acknowledgement that important voices are missing from the results, the interviews continued on with only interviewing leading voices of the neighborhood assuming that they serve as the best informants and as a way to delimit the study and prevent the study from becoming too broad.

The final ethical concern for this project is that people can be kept anonymous but sacred spaces cannot be kept anonymous. Sacred spaces are identified not just by name but also visually. So, as soon as a sacred space is identified by its characteristics it can be recognized. Therefore, no effort was made to anonymize sacred spaces. Also, the digital map includes photographs of each sacred space. These photos, however, intentionally

avoided people in the photographs who could be identified. Only a few photos of people were published on the web with the permission of those depicted in the photograph.

## Chapter 4

### About L.A.

Los Angeles is an ideal city to represent the urban context because LA has both local and global dimensions. LA is a well-known American city but it also has inhabitants and communities from many nations of the world. Los Angeles also represents the epitome of a unique built environment commonly known as urban sprawl. Unlike New York and Chicago, Los Angeles developed as a city at the same time that the automobile became a normal part of city life. LA, therefore, was one of the first cities designed and built for cars. As families grew in prosperity they spread out in the city in order to own their own homes. Carey McWilliams describes in his classic book on Los Angeles *Southern California Country*, “Los Angeles is a collection of suburbs in search of a city.”<sup>138</sup> This sprawl or collection of suburbs created a culture in which each of the 114 neighborhoods of Los Angeles carries a unique identity and culture. Each neighborhood looks and feels different from the next. Today, the growth of cities through sprawl is the norm rather than an exception. Furthermore, Los Angeles since its early development in the 1920’s gained the reputation of being a city that attracts diverse and unique expressions of religious groups.<sup>139</sup> This is a reputation that Los Angeles still carries to this day. For example, the majority of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims in the US live in California.<sup>140</sup> These interreligious dynamics make Los Angeles an ideal case

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<sup>138</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), 235.

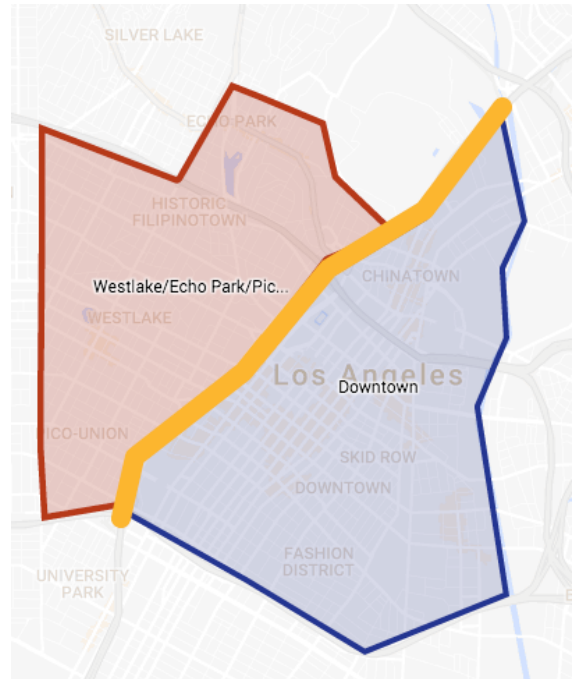
<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>140</sup> Lois Ann Lorentzen, "Golden State of Grace?," *BOOM: A Journal of California* 5, no. 4 (2016): 22, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20170116230246https://boomcalifornia.com/2016/01/06/golden-state-of-grace/>.

study for this project since the future of cities around the globe will be increasingly interreligious.

### ***The Neighborhoods***

The unique built environments of downtown and Westlake/Echo Park/Pico Union create a distinct urban culture. Although these neighborhoods exist side by side, broken up by the 110 freeway, they were selected for this project because they are a stark contrast to one another. Map 1 depicts the proximity of these neighborhoods to one another but also the yellow line represents the 110 freeway that has become a dividing line between these two neighborhoods.<sup>141</sup>



**Map 1: Two Neighborhoods in Los Angeles**

Downtown Los Angeles represents a traditional city core with a financial district but also a large homeless population. This area has a great population influx when those that work in the neighborhood during the day leave every evening. Westlake, Echo Park, and Pico Union, in contrast, are distinct because the population is mostly foreign born with many families living in these neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are ethnic enclaves. Furthermore, these two neighborhoods have vastly different built environments. Westlake and Echo Park are neighborhoods centered around lakes. Downtown, on the other hand, is a built environment with a typical city view of skyscrapers and office buildings. Each

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<sup>141</sup> The researcher created this map with Google Maps.



neighborhood is like a different habitat in the wider urban ecological system of Los Angeles. Even within downtown Skid Row is a different habitat than the Financial District. Little Tokyo is a different habitat than Chinatown. Therefore, there are different types of habitats even within a neighborhood. To map and study sacred spaces in the neighborhood also means understanding the habitat of each neighborhood and how it differs from other districts in the city.

### **Downtown, Los Angeles**

The first context of this research is the area in Los Angeles known as downtown Los Angeles. For several decades in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century downtown Los Angeles was thought to be a neighborhood that was “dead”.<sup>142</sup> Downtown, although it was where Los Angeles as a city originated, was largely abandoned by the 1960’s. The infamous urban sprawl of Los Angeles encouraged families, businesses, and churches to spread out to newly developing neighborhoods starting as early as the 1920’s. Financial workers entered downtown during the day but the space was vacant in the evenings other than the homeless of skid row. This wave of evacuations from downtown included several prominent religious congregations and resulted in their cathedrals torn down. This flight from downtown included First Unitarian church, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, First Congregational, the first Synagogue in the city B’nai B’rith, and the influential fundamentalist congregation Church of the Open Door.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Andrew Khouri, "Downtown Los Angeles Hasn't Seen This Much Construction since the 1920's," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 2017.

<sup>143</sup> Michael E. Engh, "Practically Every Religion Being Represented," in *Metropolis in the Making Los Angeles in the 1920s*, ed. Tom Sitton and William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 203.

Downtown Los Angeles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, is currently undergoing a rapid change after the city government approved the adaptive reuse ordinance in 1999. The ordinance allowed for old bank and business buildings, abandoned after the depression, to be converted into lofts. Since 1999 downtown has seen thousands of new young residents that are stimulating economic growth in downtown. Subsequently, the new residents also brought in new restaurants and boutiques to the downtown area. Currently, in 2017, downtown Los Angeles is experiencing the largest construction growth since the 1920's with 42 new buildings since 2010 and 37 projects still under construction. These projects include adaptive reuse projects, new condos, as well as hotels.<sup>144</sup>

Downtown Los Angeles is an area of 5.84 square miles.<sup>145</sup> The total population of downtown in recent estimates is 58,702, but with a daytime population of 207,440. Downtown is ethnically diverse with an estimated population that is 36.7% Latino, 22.3% Black, 21.3% Asian and 16.2% White. Downtown also incorporates the distinct neighborhoods of the financial district, skid row, Little Tokyo, Chinatown, the arts district, and the fashion district. Downtown Los Angeles serves as a diverse urban setting for the context of this research project.

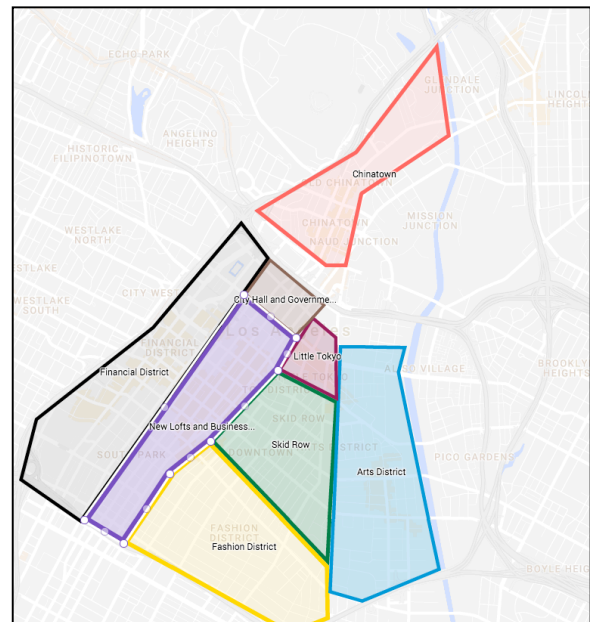
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<sup>144</sup> Khouri, "Downtown Los Angeles."

<sup>145</sup> "Downtown Profile," Mapping L.A., accessed March 30, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160416221157/http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/downtown/>.

A major portion of downtown is the financial district that clears out after 5pm. The other end of downtown is skid row, which has a large concentration of the homeless population for Los Angeles County. In between are young professionals living in lofts and finding their place in the city. Currently, gentrification and skid row exist in tension as neighbors in the same city space. Consequently, there are really two main socioeconomic populations living in downtown as the experience of the approximately 4,000 people living in skid row is vastly different than the rest of the city. This divide skews the statistics of downtown. The skid row population is generally older, less educated, and lower income, but this is not the case for the new residents of downtown. An accurate picture of downtown is that there are two socioeconomic populations coexisting. Skid Row also has a different built environment than the rest of downtown. Skid Row exists because the city designated the area to offer a concentration of missions and other resources for the homeless. Thus, the presence of missions on every block changes the experience of that space.

In addition to these two major socioeconomic populations, downtown also carries lifestyle and ethnic enclaves. Map 2 illustrates the major districts within the downtown neighborhood.<sup>146</sup> For example, Chinatown is less than a square mile area



**Map 2: Districts in Downtown, Los Angeles**

<sup>146</sup> The researcher created this map with Google Maps.

within downtown, however, it's population is 70.6% Asian with 72.4% foreign born.<sup>147</sup>

Therefore, downtown Los Angeles still carries a bit of its history as the areas of downtown known as Little Tokyo, Chinatown, and Olvera Street remind the city of its ethnic diversity and history. Furthermore, the area in downtown that was once abandoned factories is now the growing arts district with a fast growing number of high-end lofts, restaurants, and art galleries.

### **Westlake/Pico Union/Echo Park**

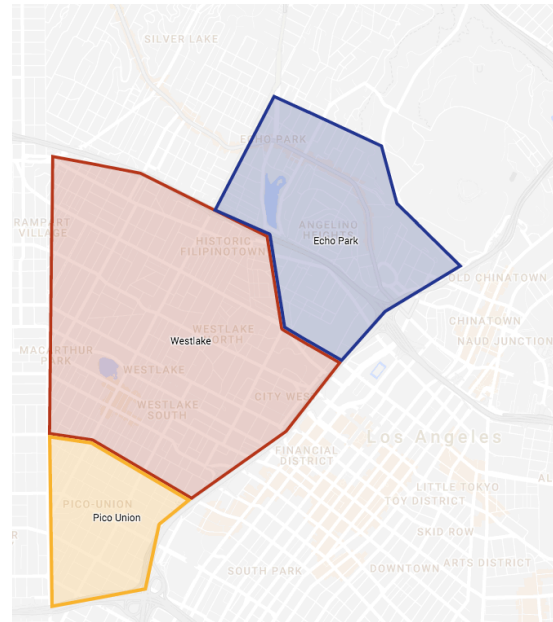
The second area selected for this research study is the neighborhoods of Westlake, Echo Park, and Pico Union. These neighborhoods are just West of downtown and are divided from downtown by a major freeway. Westlake is the primary neighborhood selected for this study, however, Westlake shares a similar population, history, and built environment with the residents of Pico Union and Echo Park. Therefore, Pico Union and the south side of Echo Park were included in the study. Therefore this area is bordered by Sunset Blvd. on the north, the 110 freeway on the East, the 10 freeway on the south, and Hoover street on the West. I chose those borders because the built environment becomes visually and culturally different on the other side of each border. In fact, Hoover Street was chosen as the West side border because the street grid literally alters after Hoover into a typical cardinal direction grid of north, south, east, west rather than a slightly 45-degree slant like in Westlake and Downtown. The grid with a 45-degree tilt is the lasting influence of the original Spanish settlement in downtown and the first suburbs of Los Angeles in Westlake, Echo Park, and Pico Union. The neighborhoods passed Westlake represent a second wave of expansion. Map 3 illustrates the borders of the area of study

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<sup>147</sup> "Chinatown Profile," Mapping L.A., accessed March 30, 2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20170129003052/http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/chinatown/>.

as well as the borderlines between Westlake, Echo Park, and Pico Union.<sup>148</sup> In the day-to-day life of the residents, however, these borders are blurred.

Westlake and Echo Park together make up about the same square mileage as downtown and is about 2 miles away from the center of Downtown. In contrast to the



**Map 3: Westlake/Echo Park/Pico Union**

skyscrapers and financial centers of

downtown, the symbols of Westlake and Echo Park are lakes. MacArthur Park Lake is at the center of Westlake and the Echo Park Lake is at the center of Echo Park. MacArthur Park was once a vacation destination for the affluent in Los Angeles especially in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>149</sup> Boating was a popular activity and hotels surrounded the park. In the 1950's and 60's the population of the park shifted to an Eastern European immigrant neighborhood. The population shifted once again in the 1970's and 80's to be the center of El Salvadoran and Guatemalan migration. Today, the area is one of the most densely populated neighborhoods on the West Coast. No one knows exactly how dense is the population, because it is common for multiple families to share one apartment without being counted in a census. The neighborhood is today 73.4% Latino and 16.5% Asian

<sup>148</sup> The researcher created this map with Google Maps.

<sup>149</sup> Nathan Masters, "Westlake (Macarthur) Park: How a Neighborhood Dump Became a Civic Treasure," KCET, accessed January 15, 2017, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/westlake-macarthur-park-how-a-neighborhood-dump-became-a-civic-treasure>.

because of neighboring Koreatown.<sup>150</sup> At least 67.6% of the population is foreign born. The population is primarily El Salvadoran and Guatemalan families that fled wars back home or indigenous Mexican populations looking for better economic opportunities. Pico Union is similar to Westlake. In fact, Pico Union was once considered Westlake until it formed it's own neighborhood identity in the 1970's emerging from the commercial center at the intersection of Pico Boulevard and Union Avenue. Pico Union today has a population that is 85.4% Latino in a 1.67 square mile area with 64.6% foreign born.<sup>151</sup>

Once used as a drinking water reservoir, in the late 1800's Echo Park lake was transformed into one of the first parks in the city of Los Angeles.<sup>152</sup> Another prominent feature of Echo Park is Angelus Temple. The megachurch in the shape of a megaphone was built by Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the Foursquare denomination, in 1923.<sup>153</sup> The neighborhood changed significantly, however, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still today a predominantly Latino neighborhood with 64% of the population Latino.<sup>154</sup> 41.3 % of the residents were born in Mexico and 15.2% of the residents are from El Salvador. When compared with Westlake, these statistics show the growing gentrification in the neighborhood. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century both MacArthur Park and Echo Park were known for its gang activity and the parks were known as areas of high crime and drug

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<sup>150</sup> "Westlake Profile," Mapping L.A., accessed March 30,2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20170116230635/http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/westlake/>.

<sup>151</sup> "Pico Union Profile," Mapping L.A., accessed March 30,2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20170116230558/http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/pico-union/>.

<sup>152</sup> "Echo Park's Lake Began as a Drinking Water Reservoir," KCET, accessed December 9,2016, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/echo-parks-lake-began-as-a-drinking-water-reservoir>.

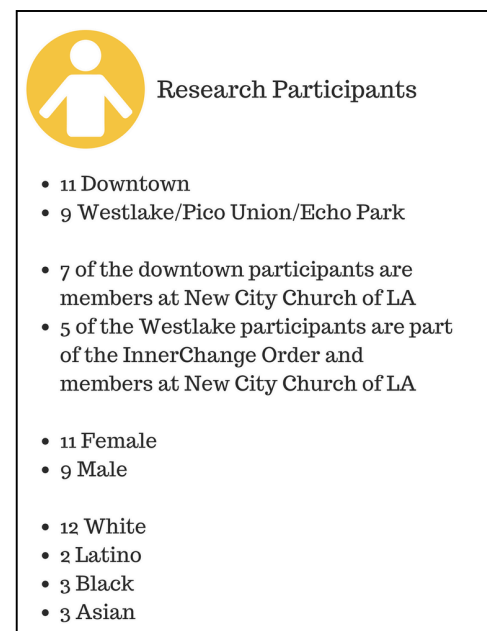
<sup>153</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple Mcpherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>154</sup> "Echo Park Profile," Mapping L.A., accessed March 30,2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160416221332/http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/echo-park/>.

activity. In the last few years, however, Echo Park has been frequently sighted in the news as one of the prime areas of gentrification in Los Angeles.<sup>155</sup> This change includes a significant two-year remodeling project of the park that finished recently in 2014. Now people of various ethnicities and socioeconomic status use the park. Echo Park, Westlake and Pico Union were selected for this study because they serve as examples of a neighborhood that is predominately populated by immigrant families. Furthermore, the existence of two prominent parks and lakes in the middle of these neighborhoods serve as a unique comparison with downtown which does not have any water features or a clear center location in the neighborhood. Residents in Westlake, Pico Union, and Echo Park have a beautiful view of the downtown skyline. But the view is also a reminder of the world of difference that divides the two neighborhoods.

### ***Research Participants***

This study incorporates the interviews of 20 research participants. Figure 1 shows the demographics of the research participants. Each participant was selected because they live and/or work in the neighborhoods in which this study is located. Furthermore, they were selected because they lead or serve in the neighborhood in some capacity. Community leaders are key informants of the neighborhood because they know the



**Figure 1: Research Participants**

<sup>155</sup> Eric Trules, *HuffPost Los Angeles*, accessed June 7, 2014, [https://web.archive.org/web/20160411232127/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/trules/the-gentrification-of-mi-\\_b\\_5435209.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20160411232127/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/trules/the-gentrification-of-mi-_b_5435209.html).

neighborhood well and have spent time thinking intentionally about the neighborhood.

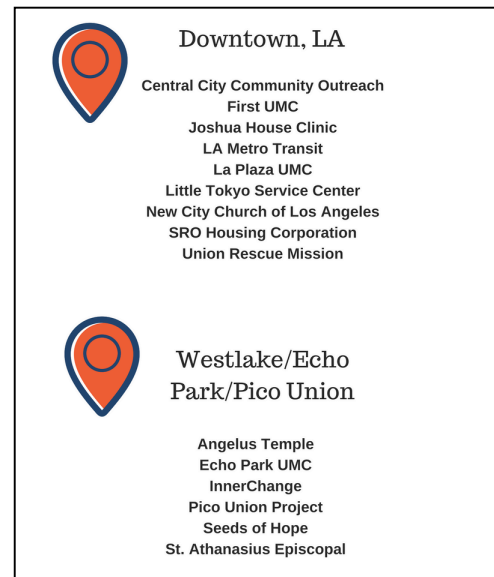
11 of the participants recruited for this study are involved in the downtown neighborhood. 7 of the downtown participants are members of New City Church of LA, which is a non-denominational Christian congregation at the heart of downtown Los Angeles. New City Church started in 2007 as a response to the adaptive reuse ordinance.<sup>156</sup> The vision of the church is to be a church that represents all the voices of downtown Los Angeles. Therefore, the church is multiethnic, multi-socioeconomic, and diverse in age. There are members of the church from the skid row area. There are also members of the church living in the area lofts and apartments. The church is almost equal in gender with slightly more male than female members. New City Church was selected for this study because the members of the church represent different Christian perspectives of living in downtown Los Angeles. Of the 7 New City Church participants 5 also live in downtown. 1 participant lives in Little Tokyo, 2 live in one of the new readapted lofts downtown, and 2 live and work for a housing unit in Skid Row. All of these participants lead in Christian ministries downtown including New City Church, Joshua House Medical Clinic, and various Skid Row non-profits. I, the researcher, am also a member of New City Church of Los Angeles as well as a leader in the church. Of the other 4 downtown participants 1 is involved with First United Methodist Church in the financial district, 1 is involved with Central City Community Outreach in Skid Row, 1 is the pastor of La Plaza United Methodist Church at Olvera Street, and 1 recently retired as the director of the Little Tokyo Service Center.

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<sup>156</sup> "About New City Church of Los Angeles," New City Church of LA, accessed March 30, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160411232002/http://newcitychurchla.com/about/>.



The other half of the interviews conducted for this project draw from 9 research participants that live or work in the Westlake/Echo Park/Pico Union neighborhoods. 5 of the participants are members of the InnerChange ministry. InnerChange is a Christian religious order committed to living and serving in the Westlake neighborhood. The other 4 research participants are leaders of various congregations in the neighborhood including The Pico Union



**Figure 2: Participant Networks**

Project, St. Athanasius Episcopal Church, Angelus Temple, and Echo Park United Methodist Church. The research participants create a network of religious congregations and non-profits that care for the city. Figure 2 lists the network of organizations that the participants are involved with.

11 participants are female and 9 male. 12 participants are white, 2 Latino, 3 black, and 3 Asian. The research participants, as active religious practitioners, represent the presence of the sacred in their neighborhoods. 19 of the 20 participants profess a Christian faith and 1 participant follows a Jewish faith. The focus on Christian experiences of the city delimits the scope of this project, but also provides a specialized emphasis on a Judeo-Christian experience of the city. The research participants shared in their interviews their spiritual routines in the context of living and working in the city. They also shared the places most meaningful to them in the city through their stories, maps, and tour of their neighborhood or facility.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Finding and Practicing Sacred Place**

My initial research of two Los Angeles neighborhoods discovered neighborhoods within neighborhoods. My effort to discover commonalities in how one practices religion in urban contexts led to twenty unique stories of twenty distinct individuals. Each interview is just a glimpse of a live, ongoing story within the city. Every neighborhood also tells different stories about who lives there. Similarly, my effort to understand sacred spaces led me to 204 different places. Each sacred space carries its own unique history and is full of stories. All of the sacred spaces share an urban setting, but they face different sets of challenges and circumstances. The diversity of sacred spaces, although difficult to organize, creates a multiplicity of portraits or scenarios that one might find in other cities.

Despite the diversity of places and experiences that must be acknowledged, the findings of this project draw out four common themes that answer the following questions. What does urban religion look like in Los Angeles? What forms are sacred spaces taking in the city and what are their common characteristics? What do spiritual practices in the city look like for individuals and for religious congregations? Finally, what hinders spirituality in the city? These findings piece together a picture of urban spirituality in Los Angeles. The interviews provided a thick description of not only sacred spaces in the city but also how people are engaging with urban spaces. My observations and mapping provided not only data but also personal experiences with the spaces in the city.

Before getting into the findings, the following provides an account of the unique methodologies. It was difficult to predict beforehand how participants would react to the tasks of mapping and walking. Therefore, I tweaked interview questions along the way to improve the process. There were some unpredicted reactions along the way. During the cognitive mapping process, for example, one participant refused to map stating that he is not good with maps. Another participant was unable to map due to an injured hand. Thus, these interviews had to be accommodated by the participant's request to talk through a verbal map of their neighborhood. The result is that these participants identified fewer sacred spaces than the participants who did draw a map. Only 5 participants started their maps with a grid of streets. The remaining 13 participants who drew a map started their maps with significant places and drew in streets as they were needed. Those that started with a grid admitted later on that their maps were inaccurate since not all streets fit into the grid system. Those that did not start with a grid, however, more commonly admitted that their proportions and spacing were off. 3 participants did not include streets but only drew sacred spaces in proportion to one another. 5 participants mapped in silence and then we talked about their maps after. The remaining participants talked about the places as they were drawing them in. Those that talked through their mapping were more likely to leave unfinished sentences and change the topic of conversation as they thought of more places to put on their map. As participants talked about the sacred spaces in their neighborhood they would point, trace over, or use different colors to emphasize what they believed to be the most important places.

Walking as a sensory interview method made the feel of the conversation more casual and sensory stimuli were more likely to change the topic of conversation. For

example, passing by a certain smell, the traffic noise, or a sudden emergency vehicle siren would remind the participants about their sense experiences and change the topic of conversation. Something I did not expect was that during the walking interviews we could encounter acquaintances of the participants. This happened 8 times out of the 20 interviews and we stopped the interview to talk and meet with their acquaintances. This occurrence, however, testifies to a common urban phenomenon. The walkability of urban neighborhoods increases the likelihood of running into people you know.

My initial reconnaissance map found 98 places in both neighborhoods not including a separate count of 76 storefront churches and 31 Korean churches in the Westlake/Pico Union area. The interviews mentioned a total of 90 distinct places. 17 places were mentioned in the interviews that were not on my original reconnaissance map. Most of these places were sacred only to one particular participant because of their personal experiences in that place. 15 places on my map were never mentioned in an interview. 7 of these places not mentioned in an interview are ethnic specific congregations. Thus participants may not be aware of these congregations because they are not part of that ethnic culture. 5 of the unmentioned sacred spaces are new evangelical church plants that are renting theaters or offices to meet. These are what Katie Day called *recyclers* in her research.<sup>157</sup> I speculate that participants may not have been aware of these recycler congregations because these congregations are new groups to the neighborhood, they do not have a visible sign during the week, and only have temporary signs when they congregate. Finally, 2 sacred spaces not mentioned by research participants are art spaces. This finding may reveal my bias as art spaces may not be

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<sup>157</sup> Day and Conboy, *Faith on the Avenue*, 31.

considered a sacred space to most people like they are to me. Figure 3 shows a preliminary count of types of formal sacred spaces found in the neighborhoods studied.

### ***Urban Religion in Los Angeles***

A definite finding from this project is a picture of urban religion in Los Angeles.

Although I can hope that some of the characteristics and practices of sacred spaces discussed later on can carry over into other urban contexts, a clear result of

this study is a plethora of examples of urban expressions particularly in Los Angeles. Each unique expression of sacred space could be studied on its own. Particularly, religion in Los Angeles has created urban expressions of shared spaces, recyclers, adaptive reuse projects, and architecture adapted for ethnic specific congregations. These may not be unique to cities since these expressions of sacred spaces may be found in other urban areas, but I believe that these are more common in cities rather than suburban or rural areas.

### **Historic Buildings**

### **Formal Sacred Spaces**



- 11 Catholic Cathedrals
- 21 Traditional protestant churches
  - 3 of these are adaptive reuse projects
  - 7 of these have 2 or more congregations sharing the building
  - 11 of these are ethnic enclave congregations



76 Storefront churches in Westlake and Pico Union



31 Korean churches in Westlake and Pico Union

9 Church plants in "recycled" spaces in Downtown

8 Temples

3 Orthodox cathedrals

1 Jewish Chabad

1 Historic Jewish synagogue shared by multifaith congregations including the Women's Mosque of America

**Figure 3: Types of Formal Sacred Spaces Found in LA**

To begin our review of sacred spaces in Los Angeles I begin with what is most familiar to us: historic sacred architecture. How are church buildings and cathedrals changing? If they are not being torn down, how are they being used? I found 44 total religious buildings in the two areas of downtown and Westlake/Echo Park/Pico Union. These were buildings built specifically for a congregation. Most of them are historic buildings from the early twentieth century. Most of them are visually identifiable as religious architecture. 21 of these sacred spaces are in Westlake, Echo Park, and the eastern half of Pico Union. 23 historic sacred buildings are in downtown scattered throughout Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and the financial district. Interestingly, of the 21 protestant buildings 11 are ethnic enclave congregations and 7 are buildings shared by multiple congregations. These numbers reveal two important characteristics of urban religion that is prevalent throughout Los Angeles but also is occurring in other major cities. First, the numbers of ethnic enclave congregations reveal that the future of the protestant faith is increasingly non-white. The protestant faith is increasingly Spanish, Korean, and Chinese speaking. Thus there is a greater growth of non-English congregations that are either building their own sacred spaces or have taken over previously built sacred spaces. Second, the number of congregations sharing a sacred space reveals a unique urban phenomenon that as majority white congregations decline and as urban density makes it harder for new ethnic congregations to find space there is a need to share sacred spaces. This raises new questions for churches on how these congregations can learn to interact well. In most cases, they remain carefully divided partnerships that only share space but do not socially interact. One barrier for congregations sharing space is usually a language barrier. Echo Park UMC not only has 3

congregations using 3 different languages sharing their sanctuary but they also lease their offices on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor to nonprofits such as LA Poverty and an Alcoholics Anonymous group. In fact, one participant from Echo Park UMC stated that sharing space with nonprofits also provides monetary resources to help with the upkeep of the building.

The Pico Union project is a very distinct expression of sharing a sacred space. The old synagogue building, built in 1909, not only has congregations of different languages sharing space, but they are also interfaith. There are five congregations that use the Pico Union sanctuary. A Jewish congregation and the first women's mosque in Los Angeles each meet once a month. Three other protestant congregations of different languages use the space weekly. One of the research participants on staff with the Pico Union project said,

I think the lesson in this neighborhood, especially when people see some of these old buildings that are just phenomenal, they have to remind people that they only still stand because they become relevant with new demographics of people who are coming there, who took ownership for it, and who made them a relevant place. We have a vision for repurposing this, which is important. Everyday I hear about churches and synagogues going out of business. I hope that the model that we're giving to people of building this community, and doing interfaith work can really help people see a future of building resources between different faith groups in order to sustain themselves. This is the only place I can see where people are doing this stuff (Participant A).

Again this participant admitted that the congregations sharing the Pico Union sanctuary do not necessarily talk to one another. But the first step is being willing to share space, and the next step is learning to talk to one another. The same participant explained about the challenging process of bringing in The Women's Mosque of America,

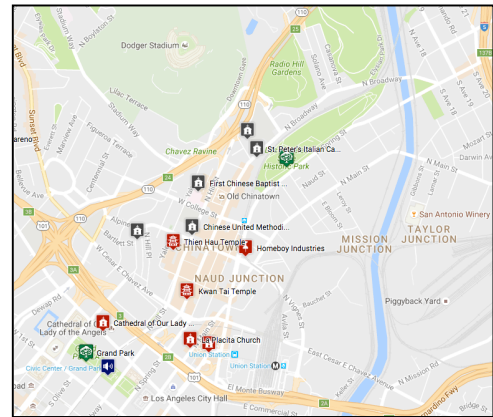
So they came and inaugurated the women's mosque of America. They're here in this building. Did it come with push-back? Absolutely. Did it come with terrorist threats? Domestic and from the Middle East, absolutely. But we really felt that this group needed sanctuary. That's really the way we think about our space as a place of sanctuary. People need a safe space in order to be able to develop themselves. In order to do those soulful things that work. We want to provide that space (Participant A).

This participant's vision reflects the necessity for congregations learning to share space to see the value in sharing, to have a vision for sharing, and to be willing to protect and support one another.

In the area of study there are 11 historic Catholic cathedrals. Since these cathedrals are part of a greater organizational hierarchy these cathedrals are distributed to each neighborhood. Just like the shift in the protestant faith, however, 9 out of the 11 catholic churches in this area primarily focus on non-English

languages. Each cathedral may have one English language mass, but they offer several more

masses in other languages. The Los Angeles archdiocese is the largest in the U.S. and 70% of this population is Spanish speaking.<sup>158</sup> I was surprised and pleased to see that the visual aesthetics of these cathedrals in the city attempt to match the culture of the congregation that meets there. I saw Jesus with dark skin at St. Josephs at the south end of downtown. I saw an Asian looking Mary at St. Bridget's Catholic Church in Chinatown. The headquarters of the archdiocese at the Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels is a beautiful and artistic space that includes a large outdoor courtyard with many nooks and paths for sitting. In Chinatown there is a unique circumstance where St. Bridget's Cantonese speaking Catholic church is right next door to St. Peter's Italian Catholic church. The presence of these two congregations reveals the layered history of



**Map 4: Map of Sacred Spaces in Chinatown and Around Olvera Street**

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<sup>158</sup> Paula M. Kane, "Getting Beyond Gothic Challenges for Contemporary Catholic Church Architecture" in *American Sanctuary: Understanding Sacred Spaces*, ed. Louis P. Nelson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 146.



the neighborhood, which was once Little Italy but became Chinatown. Map 4 depicts the sacred spaces around Chinatown and Olvera Street.<sup>159</sup> Just in this small area there are four cathedrals including St. Peter's Italian Catholic Church, St. Bridget's Chinese Catholic Church, The Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels, and La Placita.

In addition to the Catholic cathedrals, there are 3 Orthodox cathedrals in the area of study and they are also ethnic and language specific congregations with one Croatian and one Ukrainian congregation. St. Nicholas Orthodox cathedral in Westlake has services in Spanish, English, and Arabic. The languages offered reveal their efforts to also reach the people in the neighborhood that has changed dramatically around them.

Three of the historic sacred spaces downtown are adaptive reuse projects. This is a significant number compared to the fact that there are only 16 churches and cathedrals with sacred architecture in the downtown area and 3 of them have been adapted for new purposes. St. Vibiana's, the second Catholic cathedral in Los Angeles and the original headquarters of the Los Angeles archdiocese, is now a high-class restaurant and event space. Union Church, the original location of one of the first Japanese protestant congregations in Little Tokyo, is now a theater and art space for an Asian-American theater company. One participant who took a lead role in initiating and planning the adaptive reuse of Union Church explained,

I felt this was a sign from God. It was so strange to me. I think God was saying to me why don't you do this project. It not only preserves the building, and a church is a little bit like a theater, so it's a good adaptive reuse for a building. But it also is a good economic development because people come to see a show, hopefully they'll have a meal, or walk around. So it brings people. It adds to the nightlife. Because back then Little Tokyo was pretty desolate. So we wanted things to make Little Tokyo more alive. Hopefully people will enjoy it and come back (Participant B).

His statement reveals that adaptive reuse can also serve to reignite a dying neighborhood.

Interestingly, this participant revealed that because of his faith he could see the adaptive

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<sup>159</sup> The researcher created this map with Google Maps.

reuse of a traditional religious building as a spiritual task to preserve history. The Ace Hotel chain, the other significant adaptive reuse project, took over the beautiful United Artist Theater downtown and adjacent office tower. The United Artist Theater was once a movie theater built by actors Charlie Chaplain, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks.<sup>160</sup> The theater, however, was modeled after a gothic cathedral in Spain and took on characteristics of sacred architecture. It was fitting, then, that after the movie industry moved to Hollywood the building served as the location for University Church led by fundamentalist preacher Rev. Gene Scott. Rev. Scott was infamous because he was one of the first preachers to broadcast his sermons. He was one of the first televangelists. Rev. Scott changed the skyline of Los Angeles by bringing two neon signs flashing the words “Jesus Saves” to the top of the building. Ace Hotel chose to save one of those signs, which can be seen from the rooftop bar. Ace Hotel now serves as a hotel, concert venue, and a famous rooftop bar. This conversion of sacred architecture into event spaces and especially third spaces reveals the attraction that the culture still has towards sacred architecture. People are drawn towards the aesthetics of sacred buildings. The adaptive reuse of sacred architecture in many western cities also reveals a need for third spaces.

### **Recyclers**

In this study I discovered 10 recyclers. 9 of these congregations are protestant and 1 a Jewish community center. All of these spaces are downtown. Map 5 shows a map of sacred spaces in downtown, Los Angeles.<sup>161</sup> This wave of new church plants reflects the dramatic growth of downtown and so these churches can be considered what Cimino

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<sup>160</sup> Matt Tyrnauer, "Hotel California," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 16, 2014.

<sup>161</sup> The researcher created this map with Google Maps.

called *lifestyle enclaves*. They started with the vision to reach the new population moving into downtown, Los Angeles. At the same time, the tendency for new protestant church plants to recycle other types of community spaces into sacred spaces reflect the evangelical value for neutral spaces. Just like megachurches that strive to look like a familiar shopping mall or college campus, evangelical churches value creating a sacred space that is not intimidating with religious symbols and feels comfortable for anyone. 3 of the 9 recycled sacred spaces use historic theaters in downtown. Downtown, Los Angeles as the birthplace of the movie industry at one time in the early



**Map 5: Map of Sacred Spaces in downtown, Los Angeles**

twentieth century was the place to see movies. Consequently, there are many old abandoned theaters downtown that are rare to find in other cities or even in other areas of Los Angeles. New City Church of LA where 7 of the downtown participants attend church is one such sacred space that utilizes the Los Angeles Theater Center. Another rather infamous church plant that uses a historic theater downtown is the Los Angeles branch of the Australian based Hillsong church. They meet in the Belasco Theater. Hillsong Los Angeles was recently featured in a New York Times article by Michael Paulson.<sup>162</sup> In it Paulson describes the church like a nightclub. It is a unique

<sup>162</sup> Michael Paulson, "Megachurch with a Beat Lures a Young Flock," *The New York Times*, September 10, 2014.

urban expression of faith that is successfully drawing in thousands of urban young people to the Christian faith.

One church plant not counted as a recycler but has no real category is The Row Church also known as “The Church without Walls.” This congregation started 10 years ago and intentionally made the decision to not own, build, or even rent a place.<sup>163</sup> They meet faithfully every week at an inconspicuous street corner in the Skid Row area of downtown. This is a church that made a conscious decision concerning space that they did not need a traditional sacred space. They only needed a little open space.

### **New Immigrant Spaces**

As discussed earlier ethnic specific and language specific congregations are taking over or sharing space in traditional sacred buildings. But the wave of immigrant religious practitioners is much bigger. Immigrant communities are also making their own sacred spaces and consequently creating new expressions of urban religion and altering the built environment. In the less than one square mile of Little Tokyo there are five Buddhist temples. Each temple, although all within walking distance from one another, has a distinct and beautiful architecture. One participant who has worked with the Little Tokyo community for many decades explains why these temples are not only sacred for religious reasons but also for historical and personal reasons. He said when we walked to the Koyasan Temple,

During the war many people stored their stuff here in the basement. So like my family, my father and my two older brothers, after the war there was no place to live, so they stayed here. They slept on the floor for a month until they could find a place to move into (Participant B).

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<sup>163</sup> Gale Holland, "Skid Row Street-Corner Minister Calls for Homeless State of Emergency Declaration," *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 2016.

Chinatown, also an area of less than one square mile, has two visible temples that mix Daoist and Buddhist characteristics. Chinatown, however, has even more informal Buddhist or Daoist altars that are scattered all throughout the neighborhood. Westlake, despite being primarily El Salvadoran and Guatemalan, has a Cambodian Buddhist temple. In fact, the congregation is in the process of building a much larger and elaborate temple next to their current space. These

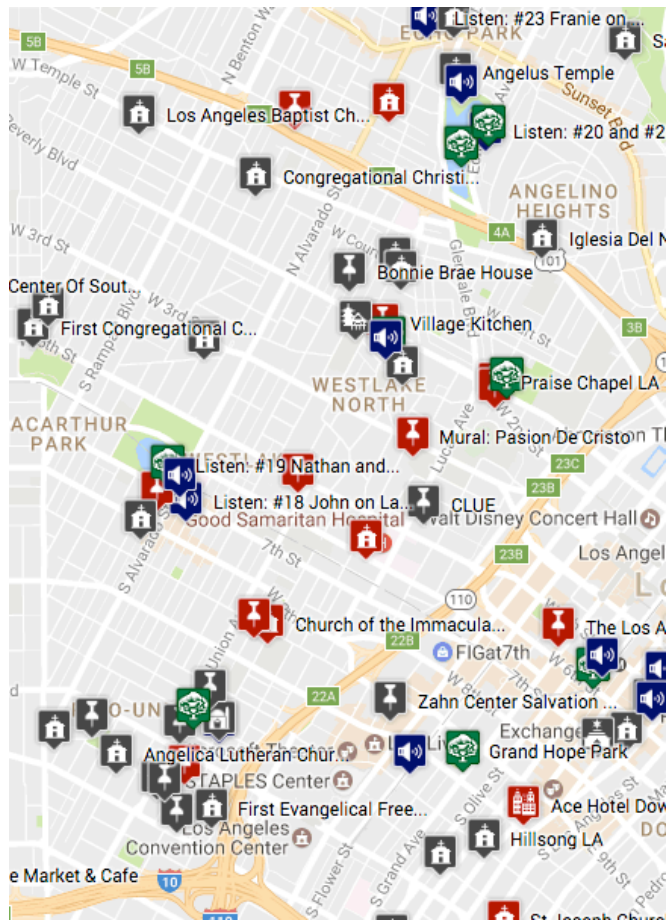
This map illustrates the distribution of 100,000 people across a portion of Los Angeles. The population is concentrated in the San Fernando Valley and surrounding urban areas. Key locations labeled include Echo Park, Angelino Heights, Westlake North, Westlake, Pico Union, and the Los Angeles Convention Center. Major highways like I-5, I-10, and I-405 are shown. The map uses orange and blue dots to represent population density, with a higher concentration of dots in the valley and surrounding urban areas.

A very prominent example of new immigrant spaces in urban areas is the

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storefront churches. There are an additional 14 storefront churches in Pico Union.

Westlake, as well as Pico Union and Echo Park, is an extremely religious area. In fact, it was very difficult to map all the sacred spaces in these neighborhoods and I likely missed some places if they were not visibly marked as a congregation. In order to accurately map the sacred spaces in the Westlake and Pico Union neighborhoods I had to create two separate maps. Map 6 illustrates 62 yellow dots marking Latino storefront churches that are either Spanish-speaking congregations or they speak one of the many indigenous languages of El Salvador, Mexico, and



**Map 7: Sacred Spaces in Westlake/Pico Union**

Guatemala.<sup>164</sup> Map 7 illustrates the other sacred spaces including 21 historic sacred buildings. One of the participants from the InnerChange ministry in Westlake explained,

There aren't a lot of overtly religious spaces in this neighborhood. So, you go to a lot of cities like Chicago and there's actually churches. If you look here there's nothing that actually draws you in that way. So we have storefront churches here which is a different kind of space. They are always bolted during the day and they're open for a little while at night. I do find all the services in the evenings...you can hear the Guatemalan minor it's a particular kind of music. So you'll hear it as you go. So I find that always draws me to God, it reminds me of the people that care about God (Participant C).

<sup>164</sup> The researcher created these maps with Google Maps.

Another participant from the Pico Union area tries to explain why there is an over abundance of storefront churches in the area. He said,

Of course throughout the area you're surrounded with storefront churches. ... Why you have so many of these small little storefront churches is because doctrinally they're all over the place. If you walk around the streets, and you talk to a lot of these people, their doctrinal differences between each other and their own religious identities are very shocking to most researchers. For example, traditionally a lot of the churches operating in the area are mostly Pentecostal-charismatic, Pentecostal-apostolic, Jesus only Pentecostals. It's very interesting manifestations. Fundamentalist churches at the end of the day. The great majority of them are fundamentalist churches all products of church splits (Participant A).

Storefront churches are now a common phenomenon of religious expression in Los Angeles. These communities have adapted to their neighborhoods by repurposing abandoned storefronts and creating new spaces of faith. When driving through Westlake they create a new visual streetscape as one passes one storefront church after another. If one has the opportunity to walk the streets of Westlake in the evenings, these churches have also altered the soundscape of the city street as the sounds of worship and charismatic speakers resonate out the doors of each storefront.

The religiosity of this immigrant neighborhood also takes many other forms and expressions. Scattered throughout all three neighborhoods of Westlake, Echo Park, and Pico Union and even in downtown there are botanicas. One participant sees the prevalence of botanicas as adding to the religiosity of the Westlake neighborhood. She explained, "There are mini botanicas which are spiritus sanitaria places and there's many storefront churches. So there are many, many religious spaces. Not everyone goes to them. There are many, many different spaces. Much more than most neighborhoods. But not everybody goes to the same places (Participant C)." I did not count botanicas in my original mapping, but botanicas were mentioned by 6 interview participants. Botanicas are stores that sell candles, amulets, incense, essential oils, and other religious

products.<sup>165</sup> Some botanicas even have a professional fortuneteller that offers services inside. Botanicas are sacred spaces and they are commercial spaces. A related expression of urban religion taking form in immigrant communities of Los Angeles is the religion of Santa Muerte. In some ways the veneration of Santa Muerte is practiced by the Latino Catholic community. But in other ways this is a new expression of Catholicism that has branched off of Catholicism. Santa Muerte is the saint of death often represented by skeletons.<sup>166</sup> Santa Muerte is popular in the Mexican community and particularly popular with those on the margins of society like gang members and those involved in the sex industry. Therefore, the symbols of Santa Muerte can be seen around the neighborhood and in the botanicas.

Oddly, the Westlake neighborhood also has at least 28 Korean churches. There are another 3 Korean churches in Pico Union. This seems odd because Westlake is a predominantly Latino neighborhood. However, just West of Westlake is Koreatown. So, it seems that Korean congregations needed to find spaces outside of their immediate neighborhood. The abundance of Korean churches also adds to the religiosity of the area. In Map 6, the blue dots represent Korean churches in the neighborhood. These Korean churches do not use storefronts. Rather they tend to utilize box buildings that were likely old office buildings. Thus, the Korean churches do not have particularly religious architecture. However, they usually have large signs or crosses identifying their building as a church.

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<sup>165</sup> Brittny Mejia, "Downtown L.A. Drugstore Sells Folk Medicine to Bring Love, Money," *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 2015.

<sup>166</sup> Tanvi Misra, "Wanted: More Discourse on Designing Diverse Communities," City Lab, accessed January 16, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20170116230515/http://www.citylab.com/design/2014/11/wanted-more-and-better-discourse-on-designing-diverse-communities/382614/>.



## **Tourist Sites**

Two distinct expressions of urban religion and immigrant religion are La Placita and La Plaza United Methodist Church at Olvera Street. I spent time visiting and observing both spaces. The plaza at Olvera St. is a historical memorial that commemorates where Los Angeles originated as a Spanish settlement and where Los Angeles began as a city. In other words, Olvera Street is a tourist destination. This unique circumstance of being a historically preserved sacred space at a tourist destination presents unique challenges for the congregations that gather in the spaces. La Placita is the affectionate term for the original Cathedral of Los Angeles. The new massive center of the Los Angeles Catholic archdiocese at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels is less than a mile away. Yet, La Placita is still held sacred to the Latino community of Los Angeles and particularly the Mexican Catholic community. If one observes the rhythms of La Placita it is almost like a pilgrimage site. Every day the religiously devout are going in and out of the sacred space to pray. They utilize the large outdoor, colorful mural devoted to the Virgin of Guadalupe. They also make their way around to the smaller altars in the chapel. La Placita has more foot traffic during the weekday than the much larger archdiocese up the hill. La Placita is most known in the community, though, for infant baptisms. La Placita is one of the few Catholic cathedrals in the city that will baptize infants without requiring the parents to have active participation and membership in the church. Therefore, La Placita is also like a tourist destination in that it is a one-stop shop for baby baptisms. On the weekends when infant baptisms are offered there are lines of families weaving back and forth in the courtyard and out the door of the sacred space. The popularity of infant baptisms here demonstrates the number of Latino families in Los

Angeles that are culturally or nominally Catholic and not active in a particular congregation.

La Plaza United Methodist Church (UMC) is near La Placita and also faces the plaza at Olvera Street. Out of the 17 historic sacred buildings in downtown 3 of the buildings still standing are UMC churches. There is one on Olvera Street, one in Chinatown, and one in Little Tokyo. The presence of these buildings speaks to the history of the UMC. The United Methodist clergy and missionaries were one of the first church leaders in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to enter into immigrant neighborhoods of Los Angeles and establish ethnic and language specific congregations. La Plaza UMC at Olvera St. was one of the first protestant churches for the first Spanish speaking communities of Los Angeles. It is still a small Spanish speaking congregation to this day. La Plaza UMC has responded to the unique challenge of being near a tourist destination by creating a tourist destination. They maintain in their basement the Social Justice Museum. The museum has revolving exhibits that demonstrate the intersection of justice and faith in the city of Los Angeles. One of the research participants from La Plaza UMC explained,

Another thing is we have our Los Angeles United Methodist Museum of Social Justice. That museum sees thousands of people during the year. We have had exhibitions on different topics affecting social situations in our community. For example, right now the exhibit is the Goodwill in Southern California which was connected with the Methodist church in this area and specifically with this church since it's beginning. Before that we had another exhibition on civil rights struggles in Los Angeles. Another previous exhibition was on the immigration issue at the border in Mexico. Part of the agreement was that we needed to have some space for community service. That's where the idea of the museum came up. That's the technical aspect. After that it provides a safe space for the people not only from Los Angeles or related to the UMC, but people from all around the world who visit Olvera street or El Pueblo to have access to some of our story. Stories related to social issues. Issues where the church, the UMC, has been, still is, and it will be present anytime that any social struggles has been raised in the different sectors of our community. So I think it's relevant in that sense (Participant D).

La Plaza UMC has embraced the rhythm of the space as visitors and tourists walk in and out of the building. Some just peek in and others stay and sit a while. The space is also

often filled with the sounds of festivals and music performances just outside their front doors. The congregants have embraced their building as part of history as they also seek to share their own history in Los Angeles.

What does urban religion look like in Los Angeles? This mapping project of sacred spaces in Los Angeles reveals that urban religion in Los Angeles is expressed in shared sacred spaces, evangelical church plants utilizing theaters, sacred spaces adapted as new immigrant spaces, and even sacred spaces as tourist destinations. Urban religion is expressed through multiple faiths and in non-religious architecture. These snapshots of sacred spaces in Los Angeles also give us glimpses of sacred buildings being used in unique and creative ways like the Pico Union Project, the Church without Walls, and the Social Justice Museum.

### ***Types of Informal Sacred Spaces***

In addition to traditional religious congregations and sacred architecture, the participants in this study also found sacred spaces in other non-traditional and public forms.

Sacred spaces in the city are not just in the diminishing number of sacred buildings, but the interviews revealed that sacred spaces can be found in green spaces, third spaces, memorials, non-profit organizations, murals, and homes. These types of spaces are what



**Figure 4: Types of Informal Sacred Spaces in Los Angeles**

this project defines as informal sacred spaces. I was interested to find out from the participants what makes these spaces sacred. Figure 4 lists the types of informal sacred spaces found in this study.

### **Green Spaces**

All 20 interview participants mentioned green spaces as not only important to the city but sacred for the city. Green spaces fall into the category of informal sacred spaces. What makes them sacred for the participants? The interviews revealed that green spaces are valued not just because they have grass and trees, but green spaces are valued because of the people in them. They are also third spaces. In other words, they are spaces that facilitate different people from the neighborhood using and sharing one space. One of the downtown participants explains,

Nobody realizes how many parks there are in downtown. Grand Park is one of those. Nobody has this anywhere else. There's people there you'll never see again. But there are also people you see there at the same time all the time. You build that bond with them. There are so many community events there. It's where we all go. People don't like to say they go to church. People don't like to say they believe in God. They don't like to say they're meditating, though they're happy to do yoga. But this whole thing of getting together for the sake of let's have quiet time, there.  
*Participant points to Grand Park on her map. (Participant E).*

For this participant it is particularly the atmosphere that brings people together and feels sacred to her, but also it is a quiet space. Similarly, one of the participants in Westlake in speaking of MacArthur Park stated,

But I think that the park also feels like sacred space to our neighbors in the sense that it gets used a lot. There's a really nice playground there and there are a lot of kids and families there. There's a big soccer field and they have a lot of sports programs there. Then the lake. There's also an area where there's more homeless folks. It feels like a home away from home. Like a community space for a lot of different groups of people (Participant F).

This participant highlighted the diversity that can be found in green spaces. In a public green space all populations can find their own space including families or those without a home. 7 participants particularly mentioned that green spaces are sacred because they are family spaces. Another participant in describing Echo Park said,

Well, I think the park is a sacred space. Because I see the kinds of things that happen there with families, yoga classes...I mean I've taken yoga classes in the park... I think parents and children playing on the playground. People having picnics. Groups of bikers. It's a gathering place. People fishing. I think all of that in an urban... it's sort of an amazing place. So I think the beauty of it and what goes on there. Sometimes I get weepy when I walk around and see these families. And they come from these tiny little apartments that they couldn't stand to be in at that time. So to me that's about as sacred as it gets (Participant G).

This participant's response highlights the activities in a park that helps facilitate the people in the community coming together and finding space. Green spaces can be used for personal or group exercise, playing at a playground or playing sports, and picnicking among many other activities.

There are 13 urban green spaces in the neighborhoods studied in this project. My direct observations of 6 of these spaces confirm the diversity of populations that use green spaces. For the most part people do not actually talk or meet with people they do not know, but from the participants' responses they like the idea of the possibility of meeting and simply sharing space with different kinds of people. One participant, however, explained how the playground could be a place where urban parents can meet other urban parents. She said,

Spring St. Park. There's a whole group of parents that bring their kids over here. There's a slide and lots of stuff for the kids to play on. And it's a nice little area. I have lots of friends that have come just from going to the park. That's been the main meeting place for parents. I've invited people there and they've started coming. And people invited me there. Now we have a little group of parents that meet there. Almost any night of the week you can go and there'd be anywhere between 3 to 10 kids and parents. It's really nice (Participant H).

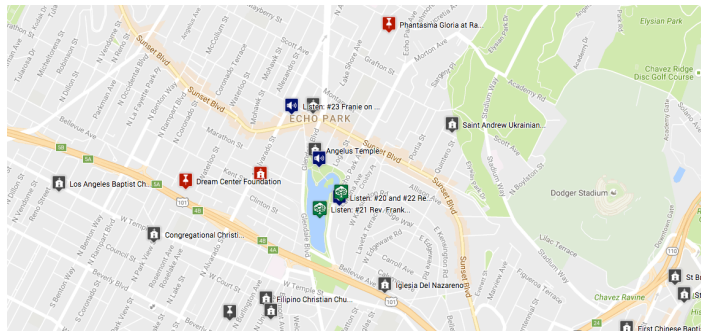
Green spaces can facilitate those with shared interests like parenting to connect with one another. The playground facilitates conversations around common interests to groups like parents. Dog parks create a similar phenomenon for dog owners to talk about their common interests. Urban green spaces are usually bordered by major city streets. They still carry the sounds of traffic, but somehow being able to take a few steps away from the street and being surrounded by an open space makes one feel like it is a quiet space even

though it technically is not quiet. Also urban green spaces provide a variety of places to sit like open grass, benches, picnic tables, or even a low wall can be used for rest.

Participants from Westlake and Echo Park particularly mentioned that the way Latino families use parks is a different way of utilizing green space. The following participant explains why MacArthur Park and Echo Park Lake are so important for Latino families,

I think one of the bigger reasons would be the space that people live in is very compressed so they don't live out of their homes like a suburban or rural family would live in their home. Like home is where you cook, clean, and sleep but other than that...just from my outside perspective it's like you kind of are forced in some ways to find peaceful places outside of that because people's apartments are so small and so loud and busy. So I think it's important because people find either solitude or beauty there. I think water is such a transcendent thing for humans too to gather around this big pool of water for some reason makes you more reflective. I think it's important to connect with nature. So I think the parks are a big draw for that too (Participant I).

In urban contexts in particular a home environment may not be the most peaceful environment. Therefore, green spaces play a significant role in providing a



**Map 8: Map of Sacred Spaces in Echo Park**

safe space outside of the home. It is very common then to see on the weekends a large crowd of Latino families at MacArthur Park and Echo Park Lake. Urban planner James Rojas explains, “The plaza was and is a central feature in Latin American cities and towns. It’s a space where Latinos build community.”<sup>167</sup> But here “the plaza is absent”. So, Latino families adapted urban parks as neighborhood plazas. Westlake and Echo Park, in particular revolve around a centralized park that has become visual symbols and

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<sup>167</sup> Mejia, "Downtown L.A."

safe spaces for their communities. Map 8 depicts sacred spaces in Echo Park and Echo Park Lake at the center.<sup>168</sup>

### **Third Spaces**

In the cognitive mapping exercises, a variety of third spaces were mentioned in general terms as sacred spaces for the community. Participants mentioned spaces like restaurants, dog parks, coffee shops, libraries, and bookstores. 11 of the 20 participants mapped and named specific third spaces in the neighborhood as sacred spaces. Edward Soja was one of the first authors to popularize the term “third space.”<sup>169</sup> Third spaces are places where people from the community who may not know each other have a chance to meet. These are gathering spaces for the neighborhood that facilitate mingling and socializing. These are well-utilized spaces.

In my direct observations of three third spaces other than green spaces, third spaces are often privately owned and commercial businesses, but they invite people to stay and sit a while. This invitation to stay, as opposed to places that value high turn over, creates the atmosphere for people to meet. Once again, people are not often connecting with people they do not know. Usually, they talk with the people they came in with. However, the idea of a third space creates the potential for strangers to meet. These commercial third spaces tend to be noisy since they tend to be popular spaces for the community. In addition, third spaces can bring a new vibrancy to a dying neighborhood. One participant in downtown explained that third spaces played a key role in catalyzing the current growth of downtown. She explained,

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<sup>168</sup> The researcher created this map with Google Maps.

<sup>169</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 11.

So there and now Starbucks, the 6th and Spring Starbucks. When I moved in there it wasn't there. When we heard it was coming we were so happy. Because like you asked before, like how the neighborhood's changed, that was how it was first starting to change. We first saw a Starbucks. It just did so much to that building. It just lightened it up. It's just ...there's a lot of homelessness, there's a lot of mental illness, there's a lot of sadness. And when you have places like Starbucks or a new pizza joint that opens up, it brings a light to what otherwise could be like a dark part of the sidewalk (Participant J).

Even a Starbucks, often criticized for being the first sign of gentrification, can be a good sign for neighborhoods that are empty and blighted. In my observations of the Starbucks on the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> and Spring this is a coffee shop where the homeless from Skid Row, the residents of government subsidized housing, and young new residents can all share the same space. Although a Starbucks can be a sign of gentrification, it can also serve as a third space that actually unites the neighborhood population.

Most importantly, third spaces help facilitate a sense of belonging that is often missing from urban contexts. One participant said, "My sense of belonging is really tied to where I feel like people have accepted my role. So it is sacred in meaning. I feel at home at Mama's Hot Tamales, at the paper store, at Tribal café. It's very much based on people. I'm an extrovert (Participant K)." This participant mentioned a restaurant, a café, and even a store as places where he has met people from his neighborhood and thus is known whenever he visits those spaces. Being known makes those commercial spaces sacred for him.

### **Sacred Memorials**

Frequently mentioned in the interviews are historical memorials in the city that commemorate a religious person or event. 11 of the participants mentioned one of the 6 sacred memorials in the area. Most of these memorials are recognized and possibly even sponsored by the city of Los Angeles. The 6 sacred memorials in Westlake, Echo Park, and downtown are the Bonnie Brae house, Azusa Street, the Biddy Mason wall, the



Foursquare Heritage Center, the Oscar Romero statue, and the Aoyama tree. A tree, a statue, a wall, a plaque, and a building can all become sacred when they remind people of sacred history. One participant explains why these historic sites are sacred to her,

I feel like it's important to recognize history. Spiritually. It's important because I feel like there was a lot of work done. I feel like the city is smart to do it. But I just know for me why it's important. And it just gives me hope. It just really gives me hope. I know it's God. I feel like he can use anyone. And it's so important that other people know that too (Participant J).

This participant recognized the sense of hope she feels when she visits one of these sacred memorials. The same participant talked specifically about the Biddy Mason wall, she said,

It was so ironic that I had been living here for as long as I have been and didn't even realize it was here. It's like right here. And hearing the stories about that and then just seeing the connection how God prepared it even before that and who he chose to use. You know, I mean an ex-slave, woman, who walked alongside this wagon, and what she was able to do. Real Estate and philanthropy and basically doing the job of the missions before the missions were doing them. Set up an account at a store for people who couldn't afford to buy groceries or buy food, she set up that. And for the sick. So you're looking at this wall, you're looking at her timeline and at the end of it it looks like this crooked cross and it's her signature. And that blew my mind because, you know, part of me just feels like ok there's no excuse. If she can do what God...and planted the church, the first African American Methodist Episcopal church, there's so much, if God can use her and no education, what is my excuse? And what am I complaining about? It just kind of reminds me that whatever you're going through God can use it for the good. And that's huge to me (Participant J).

This participant found not only hope at a sacred memorial, but she is able to feel connected to the story of the memorial. She found spiritual significance and motivation in the memorial. The story of Biddy Mason in particular is a story of a black woman, a previous slave, and one who was able to overcome the adversities in her life.<sup>170</sup> She became a leader in the African American community who helped start the First African Methodist Episcopal Church and aided those in need. At the location of her original homestead, now surrounded by high rises, there sits a wall behind a parking structure that

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<sup>170</sup> Rick Moss, "Not Quite Paradise: The Development of the African American Community in Los Angeles through 1950," *California History* 75, no. 3 (1996): 226.

depicts a timeline of Mason's life and accomplishments. It is a hidden space, but it is sacred to the history of Los Angeles.

The Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (JACCC) and the location of the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 are a unique story of memorial sites that share the same space. The JACCC is sacred to the Japanese American community. In front of their building is a large open plaza designed by famous Japanese artist Isamu Noguchi. The plaza also displays two of his art pieces that look like two massive rocks in two contrasting positions. The plaza, however, was built on the site of the first building of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church that eventually became the building for the Azusa Street Revival. This revival that activated the Pentecostal movement around the world started at the Bonnie Brae House in Westlake, also a sacred memorial, and moved to the church that Biddy Mason gave to the leader of the Azusa revival William Seymour. The old wooden building, however, was eventually torn down. In my interviews I found out that it took a leader of the Japanese American community who is a Christian to help bridge the communication divide between the Japanese American community and the African American community. This participant got the approval from the JACCC leaders to put in a plaque in the plaza to commemorate the Azusa Street Revival. The plaque is somewhat hidden. This participant explained,

So the JACCC allowed us to put this plaque in about the Azusa street revival because to them, which I understand, it (the plaza) is a work of art by Noguchi, so they don't want something that's going to change the look of it. So, we thought ok, we'll put a plaque in. From over there you don't even notice this is here (Participant B).

The same space is sacred to two different cultures for different reasons. The JACCC allows groups to gather at the plaza for the anniversary of the Azusa Street Revival, but at

the same time they resist any larger memorials or a mural that could visually disrupt their own sacred space.

In the same neighborhood is another historical monument that the city has designated as a *living* historical monument. Reverend Aoyama who was the founder of the Koyasan temple planted the Aoyama tree near the Japanese American National Museum today. In this case, Koyasan temple moved but it is difficult to move a living monument. The tree is now very tall and almost 100 years old. Like the other monuments in this city this tree is also somewhat hidden and now sits near a parking lot. However, there is a plaque to recognize the history of this tree.

My observations and interviews also took me to the sacred history of Echo Park. In 1923 itinerant evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson selected Echo Park as the site God would give her to start her revival center.<sup>171</sup> The result is the 5000-seat theater of Angelus Temple that sits as a massive sacred building at the north end of Echo Park Lake. McPherson made a significant mark on Los Angeles as she quickly reached a celebrity like status and drew in many congregants to Angelus Temple. From Angelus Temple McPherson started the Foursquare denomination. Today, the building is historically protected but it is no longer used by the Foursquare church. Rather a new charismatic leader of the Dream Center, Matthew Barnett, keeps the Temple active and vibrant. The organization took over a massive abandoned hospital nearby and started the Dream Center as an impressive non-profit working to bring transformation to the lives of those that are trying to get out of poverty and gang life. On the property of Angelus Temple, however, is a memorial called the Foursquare Heritage Center. The denomination

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<sup>171</sup> Sutton, *Aimee Semple Mcpherson*, 7.

transformed McPherson's old home into a small museum that carries her personal items and documents her life story. One participant from the denomination explained, "We don't call it a museum because museums you can't touch this, you can't touch that. And there are so many connotations. You know you just feel like I have to walk around holding my hands. So we named it a heritage center, instead of a museum (Participant Jackie)." As this participant implies the space is interactive and seeks to be a welcoming space for those interested in this piece of spiritual history. Again, the center is easy to miss and is often quiet but it is a sacred site of history for people waiting for the next Christian revival in Los Angeles.

Finally, recently installed at MacArthur Park is a statue of Archbishop Oscar Romero. This statue is the first public installation in Westlake that recognizes the El Salvadoran population in the area. One participant in Westlake explained the significance of the statue for her she said,

For me it was very important when they put Oscar Romero there because you know we have all these things that mark other groups. So you have Historic Filipinotown, you have Little Bangladesh. And there's nothing to mark Salvadoran and Guatemalan spaces. It's very interesting. So when they put this statue there I knew Oscar Romero had been an important figure, but now he has like a space that no one is going to defile. And there's quotes about his role and people will stop and put flowers. So there's this role that it has in sanctifying that corner of the park for me (Participant C).

This participant particularly describes what people do at a sacred memorial. The statue of Oscar Romero is a site where people will stop to pray or they will remember him by bringing flowers. Even more, the whole community recognizes this space as sacred because there is no one who would dare defile the space with graffiti or trash like they do in other spaces in the park. It is kept sacred by the people.

These sacred spaces found in Los Angeles reveal the importance of remembering history and having places that facilitates the act of remembering. They are sacred not just

because the land or building is old and historical, but they are sacred because they carry stories of history. My observations of these sacred memorials found that they are often quiet and empty. Some of them are hidden, but residents are aware of their presence. These are not popular spaces like a green space or a third space, but these spaces root the city of Los Angeles in its history even as the city is constantly changing.

### **Non-Profit Organizations**

Non-profit organizations were often mentioned in the interviews as sacred spaces. 14 participants placed specific non-profit organizations on their map. The digital map lists 17 non-profits that were mentioned by interview participants. The most common reason that nonprofits are considered sacred spaces for the participants is because nonprofits help facilitate life-transformation. One participant explains the three most significant spaces for him downtown as places of personal transformation. He said,

“To me these places, The Ellis, changed my life. New City, all of these places changed my life, influenced my life. Guided me in a certain direction. I could actually map how my life changed through each one of these places. I never once thought I would help people. I never once thought I would care about people. I never thought I would walk a guy to health services and sit with him, try to get him housing, try to get him some medicine. I never pictured myself praying for people. People used to come to me at the Union Rescue Mission, Ron can you pray for me. What, me?! These places, these three especially, really changed me. For a while I couldn’t believe, I didn’t even recognize myself. I’m just now, over the last couple of years, getting used to who I am. I used to battle with this. So those places are my heart, these three (Participant M).”

This participant made this statement while referring to his map. Therefore the visualization of his cognitive map helped him see the places of transformation. Non-profits are important to the urban ecology because they provide valuable resources for the community and they often provide a voice for those in the community without a voice. The actual location of these non-profits, however, become sacred as people either experience personal transformation in that place or they hear stories of others being

transformed in that place. Just like sacred memorials, stories that are hopeful can make a place sacred.

### **Murals, Vigils, and Shrines**

Another type of sacred space found in urban areas is space transformed into a sacred site by rituals or art. These sites can be murals, vigils, or shrines. These are difficult to count and map because they are often temporary. Also, these informal spaces are often only sacred to a particular community of people while other people in the community may not even notice. One participant in downtown describes murals in this way,

What I really like are the murals. Because I'm an artist. And I know that art is healing, it's cathartic, it brings beauty. I think it's the graffiti that messes it up. But when I see art like this it makes me happy. I even started making a photo journal of murals in Skid Row cause I discovered like beautiful murals in Skid Row of all places. One is this beautiful young lady and it says that she is a survivor from human trafficking. So that's beautiful (Participant J).

Murals carry an aesthetic that people are drawn to. They provide color in an environment that is often grey. This participant felt happiness and healing in seeing a mural. In fact, murals can be used intentionally as a tool to transform the look of a neighborhood. One participant from the Pico Union Project shared his experience of helping his community create murals. He explained,

I'd love to show you this...how we're being seen as expanding into the community, this kind of beautification. The most exciting idea for the neighborhood that we have is muralism. We have the storeowners coming to me to say put murals up. These neighborhoods we get walls covered with gang graffiti. So we brought in muralists to work with our young people on calligraphy and find their own style. Find some power words for the community. So now we have all of these people in this neighborhood who are taking ownership for these things and saying hey, I have a wall here. So next week I'm going to be working on that wall directly up ahead there. The owner of the barbershop comes out and says when are you going to do my wall? I asked you're donating your wall for us to use? Yeah. My idea in trying to do some level of beautification is that it's too easy in South LA for the city to look at something and say it's blight just get rid of all of it. No, we want to help people make their mark in the community (Participant A).

This participant saw an empty wall as a resource for the community. Furthermore, he saw the potential of a wall to empower the community to take ownership of their

neighborhood. This conversation came from our walking interview in which the participant took me to a newly installed mural. We experienced the beauty of that art piece together and the participant pointed to the other walls in the neighborhood that were waiting to be beautified.

Murals are sacred spaces because they are beautiful. But murals can also be sacred spaces when they are transformed into temporary vigils or shrines for the community. Vigils and shrines are common urban expressions of temporary sacred spaces. As I walked with one participant in Westlake we came upon a mural of the Virgin Mary. This led the participant to talk about how long the mural has been on the wall and how the community treats it like a shrine. She said,

Another thing you see all over the neighborhood that the Mexican, and sometimes the Salvadoran and Guatemalan, but the Virgin is all over and those are very holy spaces. So there's one right here on 6th street. There's more throughout and they come and go. So any place where people have painted the Virgin is holy for Catholics. There's also this honoring of the mom in the Virgin and it all kind of comes together. So doing visual things like that is a way people express sacredness because it's a very visual culture, the whole mural thing is part of the whole history of Latin American expression. You see it all over Latin America as well (Participant C).

This participant explained that treating murals of sacred figures as a shrine is a common urban practice in Latin American cultures. Thus we see through murals an active practice of creating sacred space in urban areas. Murals are sacred spaces created by the artists of the neighborhood.

### **Home and Hospitality**

Finally, one's home was often stated as a sacred space for the participants. 9 out of the 20 participants mapped their home as a sacred space and 4 participants also mentioned visiting their friends' homes as also sacred spaces. One participant in Westlake explained, "I think our neighbors are really family oriented too. So in some ways their homes are the places where they gather with their family. So I think those are

the sacred spaces. The place where their family is together (Participant F).” A space that facilitates intimate family time can be a characteristic that creates a personal sacred space.

One participant particularly talked about the practice of hospitality in which she uses her home in order to make it a sacred space for her friends. She said, “We try to have an atmosphere for people feeling at home in our home. So, they can just help themselves. Perpetuate that our home is their home. It becomes a sacred place because we open it up to people. We almost always have water and coffee (Participant N).” Therefore, there can be intentional practices to use a home as a welcoming space. Those that welcome others into their home also create a sense of belonging in the neighborhood. Apartment complexes in Los Angeles also have a unique urban feature that many of them feature courtyards in the center of the complex. Four participants in Westlake explained that these courtyards also serve as a place to share space with neighbors and create a sense of community in the building.

Home can also be considered a sacred space because it is a place of comfort and where one feels safe. One participant said of her home, “It’s very organic and peaceful in my apartment. It’s a studio apartment that is beautiful. I love it, absolutely love it. I spend a lot of time in my apartment (Participant O).” Therefore, a home environment that facilitates rest and a place where one can spend a significant amount of time also helps create a sacred space.

### ***Characteristics of Urban Sacred Spaces***

Another subset of codes found in the results of this study relates to characteristics of sacred spaces and what makes a place sacred. These findings can be divided into two



categories of definitions of sacred spaces and characteristics that draw someone into a sacred space. Only one participant understood the term sacred space to only refer to religious buildings. The following characteristics describe the most common characteristics the participants of this study used to describe places they found sacred. A sacred presence, people, beauty, access to resources, diversity, a sense of peace, and safe are the seven characteristics most frequently mentioned in the interviews.

### **Sacred Presence**

Half of the participants referred to sacred spaces as having spiritual activity similar to a substantial definition of sacred space. For the Christians in this research project this spiritual activity could mean the presence of God, a place to connect to God, or the place where one spends time with God. The following participant refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit as part of creating a sacred atmosphere at Central City Community Outreach. She described,

“When I came in and sat down, I was blown away by the activity of the Holy Spirit amongst the people. Super sacred space. Great praise team. People were dressed to the nines, dressed the best they could and dressed like they had gotten up after laying on the sidewalk. And everyone was all on an equal playing field and God was totally present. There was joy on every face. It was so powerful. I would just sit there and cry. I remember it and it makes me cry. So I began to see how sacred of a space it is and really how sacred all of us are no matter where we come from or where we are or where we got up that morning (Participant P).”

From this participant’s description a sacred space is exemplified by perceived supernatural activity that may result in celebration. Furthermore, this participant describes it as an emotionally powerful experience. Not all of the participants experience sacred spaces as emotionally as this example, but they mentioned similar themes of feeling God’s presence or recognizing the occurrence of supernatural activity.

## **People**

Four participants specifically emphasized in their interviews that they believe sacredness is in the people and not the place. Their definitions of sacred space are similar to a situational definition of sacred space. They emphasize, however, the value of human-to-human contact making a space sacred. This is slightly different than previous situational definitions that understood rituals as creating a sacred space. One participant explained,

A place is sacred because we make it so. You can't build sacredness into your capital improvement, architectural design. But it's not sacred, it's not set apart, it's not different than the rest of the world until we see what happens there with human beings who inhabit it. What is sacred in us come out. What is sacred in the world comes in. And I think here sacredness has a lot to do with safety. Security. Freedom to be yourself and ask questions. Come in as you are. Not get kicked out because of it (Participant P).

This participant believes that it is human beings that are sacred. Thus, when human beings gather together they make sacred space. Furthermore, there has to be an element in sacred space in which human beings are valued, belong, and are free to be themselves. Another participant similarly explained, "Sacred spaces to me are just like...I love all of the people that we interact with. Those interactions, community with them, feels like sacred space. Even though it's not as much physical, it's relational (Participant F)." When this participant experiences relational connection she experiences those places where connections happen as sacred spaces.

## **Beauty/Aesthetics**

7 participants described beauty or some form of positive aesthetics as characteristic of a sacred space. One participant explains of the Ace Hotel rooftop bar, which offers a spectacular view of the city,

It is beautiful. It's like a hipster oasis of you know beautiful, nice design. It's really pretty up there. It's free. I go and get a cup of tea at the café downstairs and then take it up to the roof. I can

sit and read or just sit and stare or whatever. The beauty is in the architecture as well as the design. I go and do my Ignatian meditation practices there on the roof with my tea (Participant O).

Ace Hotel, as stated earlier, is an adaptive reuse project that also serves as popular third space for the downtown community. This participant found, though, that the beauty of the architecture and the religious features of the architecture particularly facilitate a space for reflection. The space to sit, the ability to stare at the skyline, and a place to engage in spiritual practices all work together to create a felt sacred space. The Los Angeles Theater Center (LATC) where the congregation of New City Church meets on Sunday is another space with beautiful aesthetics. One participant explains the aesthetics of the theater when he said,

I also think of the LATC as a sacred space because of our presence there. You know a lot of people have said to me when they walked in to the lobby of the LATC and just the really, really high ceilings it was very cathedral like. It was very much like an awe-inspiring sense of transcendence. I think that's a good thing. It's a really good thing for our church because we're using such an industrial space. And I know so many churches have a low view of sacred space. I never felt comfortable with the idea of just using a movie theater and that's it. There's something missing there and I think what's missing there is that sense of awe that you get when you walk into a very beautiful sacred space. And so we actually have that which is really fortunate. I don't think that many churches can rent an industrial type of space, a commercial space and still have that sense of beauty and grandeur that you get in the lobby of the LATC. I think that's really fortunate for us, maybe even providential. But as I've gotten older I appreciate the way that sacred architecture communicates theological truths and so I think there's something to be said about high ceilings that make you recognize how small you are in the world and also cause you to look up and a sense of wonder a sense of like this took incredible craftsmanship, this took incredible work (Participant Q).

This leader of New City Church particularly describes the sense of awe that a beautiful space can evoke. A sense of awe and appreciation for beauty can connect to a spiritual sense of transcendence. These spaces remind people through its built features of the presence of the divine. Therefore, beauty, whether built or natural, is a common characteristic of sacred spaces. These spaces serve as a contrast to the places of the city that often do not value beauty. When one walks into a place that evokes a sense of awe that moment of walking in can be interpreted as a sacred moment.

## Importance of Resources

A topic that came up in 7 interviews is the need for resources. A sacred space can be sacred if it provides for the community. Furthermore, a sacred space is sacred if it recognizes the sacred in people and provides for human needs. This theme of discussion especially came up in the context of the growing homeless population all throughout Los Angeles. For this reason, non-profits were often identified as sacred spaces because they provide resources. One participant even said, “Downtown needs bathrooms so badly. Make that a sacred space. Not having access to bathrooms is such a problem. I pray about it all the time. It just seems like a silly thing to pray about but... (Participant E).” In fact, 4 participants mentioned bathrooms as a type of place lacking in downtown. Spaces of the city need to value people and provide for their needs even if that need is as unsacred as a bathroom. Another participant who works with the homeless population in Skid Row explained that even just resources are not enough. Rather, the resources should serve a greater purpose. He said,

I kept thinking there should be more substance to what we do. Feeding people is great. But I kept thinking there has to be something of more substance that we can do. If you live in Skid Row, if you walk that area, you’ll find that there is no place to really buy food. We tried to work on things that would either move people out of the neighborhood or add a quality of life while they’re there (Participant M).

The participant describes here the importance of human dignity and empowerment in giving out resources. He gives the example that giving away food is not as good as providing grocery stores within walking distance with affordable healthy foods. The city has a responsibility to provide these resources, but religious congregations if they are to be sacred spaces for the community also should be a source of resources. Therefore, a place of resources can be another characteristic of a sacred space.

## Diversity

9 participants described diversity as a valued characteristic of sacred space.

Furthermore, they found great diversity in the city. One participant in downtown said,

I think downtown is one place in Los Angeles there's something energetic about this place and I love the energy of it, the diversity of people who live here. It's just amazing. Because there's no dominant ethnic group, it actually creates a very interesting and open culture that's open to diversity and values diversity (Participant R).

Downtown, Los Angeles is rare in that there is great ethnic diversity. For this reason this participant enjoys the atmosphere and dynamics that ethnic diversity creates. Other neighborhoods in Los Angeles, like Westlake, may not be as diverse. They are ethnic enclave neighborhoods. However, even participants from Westlake stated diversity as a valued characteristic of sacred spaces. They saw in their neighborhood diversity in types of people in their neighborhood such as families, the elderly, the homeless, and young people.

One of the unexpected descriptions from the interviews is that 9 out of 20 participants thought of an intersection as the best visual image of their neighborhood when responding to the question what place represents the identity of your neighborhood. In downtown this intersection is Spring St. and 5<sup>th</sup>. In Westlake this area is Alvarado and 6<sup>th</sup> Street near MacArthur Park. In Echo Park this intersection is Sunset Blvd. and Echo Park Ave. This finding exemplifies that visual and sensory experience of the city, like standing in the middle of a busy intersection, can embody diversity and the rhythms of the city as something good. These streets symbolize the busy activity of the city as something exciting. I did not particularly ask the participants for a street, but only what place best represents the neighborhood. It seems clear from the responses, though, that streets are active spaces. Streets represent the diversity of people in the neighborhood.

Therefore, they easily visually represent the identity of the neighborhood. One participant described the intersection of Sunset Blvd. and Echo Park Blvd. in this way,

Let me give a category. I think there are some gathering places on Sunset. In markets or stores or bakeries where people gather and find each other and talk with each other. And there's a sense of neighborhood where people run into each other. I think of Echo Park Avenue and Sunset Boulevard, that corner and the spaces, the life that I see there. To me that's sacred (Participant G).

We see in this participant's response that the experience of a vibrant neighborhood can create a sacred atmosphere and even a sacred street corner. Another participant described the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Alvarado in this way, "This whole street 6th street with the botanica and the church there's a lot of spiritual activity going on there. That's kind of a sacred place (Participant S)." The atmosphere of Westlake with a plethora of religious spaces such as botanicas and storefront churches also create a visual sacred space on the streets of the neighborhood. Therefore, this sense of experiencing and seeing diversity is a unique urban phenomenon that creates a sense of the sacred. This phenomenon is very different from the need to belong as a sacred space. In this case, being part of a world much bigger makes one feel like where one lives can be sacred.

### **Sense of peace**

A sense of peace is a sacred characteristic mentioned by 5 of the interview participants. Places that are secluded from the busy environment of the city are seen as places that carry a sense of peace. One participant who has worked with the Little Tokyo population for decades said of the Japanese garden at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, "I think the JACCC, they have the garden, it's very quiet. There's a lot of solitude. Downtown is very noisy and crowded. So I think those kind of spaces probably give people a sense of being able to get away from that (Participant B)." The design of the built environment can create a sense of peace when it helps facilitate a place

of solitude. One participant particularly reflected on the lack of a sense of peace in skid row. Thus she explains that in her bible study she finds it meaningful if participants of the bible study find the space to be peaceful. She said,

But for everyone to know that there's a place you can go and feel the spirit, have some peace. When we are in class and someone falls asleep, early on when I first started people wanted to know should I wake him up. Even if they're snoring, I say no. You don't wake a baby. You don't wake someone in skid row who has found a place where they feel safe enough, first of all to close their eyes, and second to actually fall asleep. They feel secure enough to come back. This space is for them to take a nap (Participant P).

Therefore, even in an area like Skid Row which lacks a sense of peace a building or room can be used to create a temporary sense of peace. In that moment, that room becomes sacred.

### **Safe Space**

Similar to a sense of peace, 9 participants used the term *safe space* to describe a sacred space. The difficulty is finding a safe place when you have no place to go. The homeless population of the city have distinct practices of place in order to survive in the city without a home. They have adapted the built environment for their needs such as pitching tents on the sidewalk. The homeless particularly need safe spaces to sit and stay for the day without being kicked out. One downtown participant stated that the downtown public library is sacred for that reason. It is a place where the homeless population can go for a whole day without being asked to leave if they are not a disturbance. She said,

Maybe the library in some ways. Cause it's a safe place for people who are homeless to go during the day. And it's a nice place. It's not an inhospitable place either. You're not getting shuffled here and there unless you're like sleeping actively in there during the day. You just want to go somewhere where you can sit. All the books are available. You just kick back and let your guard down in the library (Participant O).

The term safe can mean different things for different populations of the community. But for the homeless population any place where they are safe and any place they can hide from the weather conditions without being asked to leave becomes a sacred haven for

them. One of the participants who serves at La Plaza UMC explained that green spaces are also sacred to the homeless population because they are also places to pass the time. She said, “I imagine for the homeless this (green space) is a sacred place because they can rest. It’s in contact with the soil, the land (Participant D).” Safe as we see in this quote also means a place to rest. Green spaces are one of those spaces that offer rest as well as the right to use the space.

Sacred presence, people, beauty, resources, diversity, peace, and safety are seven characteristics one may look for when finding a space in the city to rest, to find belonging, and to interact with the supernatural. At the same time, I must end this section with the recognition that there are also cultural differences in how a sacred space is defined. The following participant reminded me that Latino and African American cultures, for example, might look for sacred spaces in vibrant ministries rather than quiet spaces. He said,

So I think these are the kind of ministries that people look for, churches, to find some kind of connection to God and spirituality. Places of quiet prayer has a certain segment of people that are attracted to it. Probably some people who are in some sort of contemplative relationship with God they look for those things. But I think if you come from an African American spirituality for instance I don’t think it’s very contemplative. It’s much more vibrant and exciting and singing and jumping. And so they need community to do that, to practice that kind of spirituality. So it’s rare to see African Americans who grew up in that kind of African American cultured church to look for quiet places. They would look for ministries to seek God (Participant R).

This understanding of sacred space in a religious service especially seeks a sacred presence to make the space sacred, but the space does not necessarily have to be peaceful or beautiful. Furthermore, private and public spaces may be used differently in different cultures. We saw this difference earlier when looking at how parks are used. One participant from Westlake talks about his Latino neighbors,

I think in terms of culturally how most of our neighbors interact with sacred space is it’s probably much more public and communal than my personal culture. For me I think a living room could be a sacred space, a small group type thing. My church culture I grew up in sacred space it was public, but there’s also it’s informal, in a living room and private. Whereas in this neighborhood



it's formal, public and communal. So that's a challenge for our team to learn how to be sacred in the cultural spaces (Participant I).

How cultures define sacred spaces and how they use sacred spaces can be different. In this example, the participant sees home as a sacred space whereas for his neighbors sacred spaces are communal spaces.

### ***Spiritual Practices for the City***

The next section of findings asks what does religious practice in LA say about our urban spirituality? What are ways the participants practice their spiritual rhythms in the city? The results found that practices of walking, being intentional in observing the environment, caring for the neighborhood, and communal religious practices are all meaningful spiritual practices in the city.

### **Walking and Prayer**

Half of the participants described in their routines a habit of prayer walking. From their descriptions there are two primary reasons why prayer walking helps facilitate a spiritual practice in the city. One reason is simply the practice of walking can be considered a spiritual activity. The other reason is the significance of praying as one walks. One participant describes her walk home in downtown,

It's a nice walk too. I get a chance to just kind of clear my head. So finding that spot where you can have a moment and literally count your blessings, for me it's usually the walk home. Even though there's traffic whizzing by, for some reason you just don't hear it. It's the moment you're standing still. That's usually when you notice. For me, it's not necessarily the space but the transit. The walking. The walk from the garden back to the house is something where I'm gonna look at the guy who's sitting at the bus stop with grocery cart chained to the stop. I'm going to think to myself, I'm so lucky to go home to a nice warm bed. Even more importantly I hope he sleeps ok tonight. I hope nobody bothers him. I hope he's going to be ok (Participant E).

From this description walking is a chance to find a break or release from the day. It is a chance to think and reflect on the day. This statement describes a process in which acknowledging one's thoughts is a sacred process and taking a walk helps facilitate that

process. In a busy urban environment many people have no choice but to walk everyday to and from work. The act of walking, however, can become a helpful part of their day. 4 participants specifically mention their daily walking paths as being sacred time and sacred space to them. One downtown participant said,

I consider my walking paths very sacred. So I spend like my walk from here to work or from here to Joshua house is often spent praying and engaging with God for the day or for people that I see, people that I encounter. I would probably say that this on 2nd street from Los Angeles to Spring and on Los Angeles to Joshua house is probably my most sacred space. Also, the walk to church (Participant N).

This participant values the personal time she gets during the short time it takes her to walk to the different areas of her work in the city. She calls them her walking paths. But she also uses the time intentionally to pray.

Since the majority of the participants identify as Christian they are all familiar with the practice of prayer. Furthermore, they utilize their walking commutes to pray or they will pray purposefully for their neighborhood through the act of walking. The following participant describes her morning routine,

In the morning, I will usually pray the Our Father as I'm walking and personalize it. So the things that come up tend to be, because my job is really stressful and I get to work and everything all the sacred stuff all the thoughts I just had in my quiet time with God just goes out the window. So I use this time to really ask him to help me remember what's important and stay focused on that. But also I just pray for the people that I walk by, so anyone that's asleep on the streets or anyone that I know is homeless in the community that I consider my neighbor I try to interact with them and pray for them. Sometimes I'm also praying for my staff or not praying at all, feeling stressed about the day. That happens sometimes too (Participant N).

This participant will pray based on what she sees on her walk. She describes praying for the homeless folks she walks by on the sidewalk. Sometimes, she utilizes intentional prayers to also prepare for her work and her day.

7 of the participants particularly described the experience of receiving God's guidance or signs from God if they prayed as they walk. The following participant from

the InnerChange order in Westlake explains why their team engages in weekly prayer walks. He said,

The predominant worldview in our neighbors is one that definitely includes a robust reality of the supernatural world. So you can see that through just the prevalence of botanicas in the neighborhood. It's just helpful to remember that people are interacting through the world with the worldview that has witch doctors and amulets and candles for praying. I think in a way that as a Westerner it's easy for me to kind of block that out and not see that. I think prayer walking is a way for us to remind ourselves that our battle is not against flesh and blood. Our primary battle is in the supernatural realm, the spiritual realm and so we do it in order to posture ourselves to be able to listen to God and what the Holy Spirit might be saying through us in that. Also, praying on location in our neighborhood to be praying for God's kingdom to come tangibly at the same level where the other spiritual forces are. So I think we do it so we can learn what other spiritual dynamics are in the neighborhood. Listening for the different strongholds, getting to know different spiritual strongholds and then learning how we can pray more effectively and with more insight into those spiritual dynamics. That's probably the primary reason we're committed to prayer walking is just so that we will be more aware of the actual spiritual landscape and be influencing it through Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Participant I).

The participants from InnerChange understand prayer walking as a particular practice of being aware of two realities one that is physical and the other that is spiritual. Therefore, walking through the neighborhood is a chance to pay attention to spiritual forces and to the guidance of God. This participant also mentions the importance of praying on location. The urban environment and what the participant sees, hears, or experiences can help guide the content of his prayers. Therefore, being conscious of spiritual forces can even guide where one walks. One participant describes this discernment as a tangible feeling. She said,

There's a few areas between us and the office that spiritually feel really heavy for me. So there's a couple blocks I avoid. I pick my route partly by something intuitive. That's just to get from A to B. If I want to engage, then I'd be prayerful about where I'm walking (Participant C).

The same participant went on to say, "This is where being present just things happen when you're present. So some of the things we do they just kind of come up by our being there. I think it was the Holy Spirit." We see from both quotes that being aware of spiritual forces can help one avoid spiritually dark places, but also guide one to positive

experiences and actions. Walking allows one to be present in the places where God can cause good results and activities.

The importance of walking is also reflected in the fact that 5 participants talked about the value of living in a walkable neighborhood. One participant said,

Other than that I love living so close to where I work, so being able to actually walk and have it be ..because one of the things that I value is a whole life. I don't want to be compartmentalized and I feel like living close to where I work allows me to be whole. I feel less compartmentalized. I feel like it's so close that who I am at home and who I am at work is the same. And it makes it easier because it's so close (Participant N).

From this description walkability creates the sense of living a more holistic lifestyle.

Home, work, grocery stores, and restaurants can all be in one place without having to be disoriented by getting in a car. Living in a highly dense urban environment creates this experience of a walkable neighborhood. Several of the participants described how difficult it would be if they had to move to an area that was not walkable. The change would be a significant lifestyle change.

Another significant spiritual practice in the city is the practice of not ignoring the difficult experiences. Living in a city puts its inhabitants in close proximity to urban ills such as poverty and crime. 3 female participants expressed the importance of not ignoring the urban ills they see everyday. One participant who works in Skid Row said,

Then the visual stuff, it's seeing people sleeping on the streets, especially....it's really hard for me to encounter somebody that I feel like if this person were not in skid row people would be helping them. The fact that there's a person lying in the middle of the sidewalk on the ground that's for us it's like it's a normal thing. So I always struggle with that. One of my prayers is I want to stay sensitive to it, I don't want to become desensitized. But it is hard (Participant N).

Contact with the urban ills of the city is especially experienced when one is walking through the city. Usually these statements were made in the interview during the walking portion as we walked by homeless folks sitting or lying on the street. Experiencing the

urban ills of the city is a particularly visceral sense experience. It can be difficult for the body and mind to handle. Another participant downtown said,

And what grieves my spirit is seeing people panhandle. That's sad. But it's reality. I'd rather see it than be hidden from it. If it's really existing and happening. I don't want to sanitize my experience. If something needs to be fixed you need to see it, so that you're reminded hey this needs to be fixed (Participant J).

From this description it takes an intentional effort and a spiritual practice to not ignore these realities. Once again, the sense experience is important. The difficult senses that urban dwellers see or hear or smell when they walk remind them of realities that need to be changed.

### **Chance Encounters**

Another common experience of the city mentioned in the interviews is the meaningful moments that are created in chance encounters. None of the participants used the term chance encounters, rather as they talked about the important places on their map they told stories about times when they had unexpected encounters with strangers or people they know that became meaningful moments to them. The opportunity for chance encounters is reflected even in the interview process when 8 out of the 20 walking interviews resulted in chance encounters with acquaintances of the participants. A meaningful conversation or moment shared with another human are moments that make urban living meaningful. One participant told about a moment when she wrote a kind note to a stranger crying on the metro train. Another participant shared about meeting the person who first invited her to New City Church and now more than 3 years later they are great friends. The following participant tells about meeting neighbors as they were cleaning the neighborhood,

One thing nice that happened is that some of the neighbors saw us sweeping and they joined us. It's a sense of belonging I think. But sometimes just a little spark of belonging, showing that you care for the neighborhood, and they're like oh yeah we need to do that also for ourselves. They say

can I help? Probably if they see this often, and realize we should be doing it ourselves, it's our neighborhood, it's our place. Some people are like that until they see something happening (Participant T).

She explains in this quote that the chance encounter led to caring for the neighborhood together, and the interaction also facilitated a sense of belonging and connection because they live in the same neighborhood. This participant shared the story of this encounter twice during the interview. Another participant said, "But I love interacting and when I see somebody that I recognize that recognizes me and being able to have that neighbor connection because I need it...(Participant E)" Running into people you know in the neighborhood is not only a neighborly connection but it facilitates a sense of being known and knowing others. These moments of connection are meaningful.

### **Caring for the Neighborhood**

Related to the meaningful moments created through encounter 8 participants talked about the importance of caring for the neighborhood. A participant from Pico Union explains his vision for the Pico Union project,

Our essential vision that we have, our only motto that we have as a project is you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The thing about that is that you need to know your neighbor. You need to get to know your neighbor. You need to understand their needs. And you need to shoulder. Once you understand what their needs are, you can understand how to shoulder that, you understand how that relates to you (Participant A).

This participant emphasizes the importance of knowing your neighbors in order to know how to truly care for the neighborhood. One of the participants of New City Church talked about the church as a parish that can be a gathering space and resource that serves and takes care of the downtown community. He explained,

I see New City as a parish for the community, for the neighborhood. The vision has always been to be a parish in a traditional sense of that word. And I know that parish is a rural idea where people live in a farm community and they go to a church in the farm community, they go to school in the same farm community and it's a parish and they do life together. And in the city true parish really doesn't exist because people function in work that is different than their neighborhood. The network is different for their schools, friends, work, other things. So it's a combination of social networks and neighborhoods. But my feeling is that LA is becoming more parish like that people

actually want to stay in their neighborhood to shop, to go eat, to play, to go to school, and to go to church. And the only exception is really work. And I think people actually want to stay. So if that's the case, I think we need the parish to come back. So I believe there is a need to develop a parish. The whole idea is what we desire to do is to be a parish. The way we want to be a parish is to be a place of gathering for the community. Holding prayer vigils. Whatever it takes to just kind of be a part of this community and help in little ways that we can. I think that's what it means to be a parish (Participant R).

A parish model of being a sacred space in the neighborhood particularly sees a sacred space in the context of the urban ecology. Each sacred space has a responsibility to the neighborhood around it to meet needs and be involved with the activities of the city.

### **Public Liturgy**

Another significant practice where participants experienced sacred moments in the city is through public and communal liturgical practices. The participants mentioned practices like offering ashes on Ash Wednesday at the park or metro station, holding a communion meal at the park, parades through the city streets, vigils on the sidewalks, cultural festivals, and prayer stations on street corners. These are ways that congregations and groups can practice their faith together in urban contexts. The participants found these practices meaningful. These experiences evoked the most passionate stories during the interviews. One could say the 7 participants who talked about these public spiritual practices were proud of these activities.

One way that congregations readapt their religious practices for urban contexts is by offering holiday services in public spaces. During the Jewish High Holy Days, for example, there were folding billboards on the sidewalks of downtown offering services in the theater of the old Alexandria hotel downtown. For the tashlich ceremony this year participants walked from the Chabad Temple in downtown to Echo Park Lake. Thus they utilized the city streets to publicly celebrate a religious holiday. Two participants spoke

about offering Ash Wednesday blessings in public spaces. One of the participants from La Plaza UMC utilized the vibrant and public space of Olvera St. She said,

Another thing we do is during Eastertime on Ash Wednesday a group of United Methodist pastors from downtown LA we walk around the different communities where our churches are located imparting the ashes or a prayer to our neighbors. We jump onto the train and we move around, walk around the plaza Olvera. We have conversation and prayer with the merchants and the visitors in the area. That's what we normally do here when the city management has special events like Christmas or founder's day. We are present. That's how we're related with our community (Participant D).

This communal practice by a group of United Methodist pastors demonstrates the power of going out to the community rather than waiting for the community to come inside a sacred space. The merchants of Olvera St. cannot leave their shops and stands and can benefit from clergy coming to them. The UMC clergy even travel by public transportation to impart ashes to different neighborhoods around LA. Another pastor for New City Church also shared about his experience bringing ashes to Spring St. Park downtown,

I've also started to rethink our approach to some of our religious services. So, for example, with Ash Wednesday. We took Ash Wednesday sort of out into the community and that was a very intentional push to say we want to be more visible. We want to be more available. We want people to know that they can always come to us and we will come to them. Spring St. Park is a beautiful park and this is where we did Ash Wednesday. I kind of think of it as like a third space. And I also think of it because of my experience on Ash Wednesday. It's a lot of positive experiences. A lot of people stopped and appreciated that we were there. There's a security guard that sort of regularly patrols this park and he loved the fact that we were there (Participant Q).

The practice of bringing liturgical traditions and religious holidays to public spaces plays an important role in making religion visible to the community. Both examples reveal an act of going out into the neighborhood rather than expecting people from the neighborhood to enter into unfamiliar sacred spaces. Furthermore, the act of bringing liturgical traditions to public spaces make spiritual practices apart of third space activity and can facilitate interactions with the community.

Another way that congregations can practice spiritual traditions with their community is by sharing meals in the community. Five participants talked about sharing



meals with neighbors. The unique part of their stories, however, is they eat their meals in third spaces, public spaces, and parks. A participant from First United Methodist Church shared about their experience finding a long table at Grand Park. This past summer they transformed the table into a communion table like the image of the last supper in the gospels. Their congregation met in the park once a month to eat dinner together, but they also invited anyone in the park to share the meal with them. They did not use the meal to recruit people to visit their church. Rather, they shared a meal because they wanted to be with their neighbors.

Another example of liturgical practices in public spaces is through the practice of holding vigils for the community. I asked one of the participants who leads the Downtown Clergy Council why he felt it was important to hold a vigil each time someone on the streets of Skid Row dies. He responded,

I feel like I want to uphold and honor sanctity and the value of life in community. If someone important dies they make a big deal out of it. They have a funeral. If someone on the street dies nobody remembers them and they end up in the morgue for ninety days and nobody claims them. I feel like it's just not right. So the sense of honor is number one. Number two I felt like the community needs to mourn and given a forum and time to express the community's love for this person or lament for this person or kind of a person. Lament at the situation. I think the community needs that to heal. Also, when the community is around, especially when the homeless people see the honoring of individuals, it's a subconscious message to say we honor you. Everybody matters. So I think it's a good thing (Participant R).

Each time that a man or woman dies on the streets of Skid Row. The leadership and members at New City Church quickly rally together a vigil. They invite the members of the church and they invite the downtown community. They meet at the spot on the sidewalk where the person to be honored passed. They give space for anyone who knew the deceased to say a few words. They pray for the community. A temporary vigil is a particular practice of place. A spot on the sidewalk or on a street corner is temporarily claimed by flowers, candles, and notes. The sidewalk is transformed and the place

becomes a temporary place that remembers and honors. The practice draws a small crowd of people and even people just passing by that day may stop. The practice reflects the role of a congregation in the neighborhood to be a priest for the neighborhood even if the neighbors are non-religious. In times of crisis, congregations can use practices of place to help the community mourn and heal.

Another way to bring a sacred presence to public spaces is through parades and processions on city streets. We saw this in an earlier example when the Jewish community of downtown walks to Echo Park Lake in order to practice tashlich which is a ceremony of casting off sins into a body of water. Another common procession in the city is Posadas which remembers the journey of Joseph and Mary before celebrating Christmas. Olvera Street is transformed every year in participation with La Placita. They convert the entire plaza into a space to experience the Posadas. Almost every Spanish-speaking Catholic cathedral in the city has a form of celebrating the Posadas in the streets around their space. Even a protestant congregation that shares the sanctuary at Echo Park UMC celebrates a yearly Posadas by walking around the Echo Park neighborhood. There are many other religious communities that bring their sights, sounds, and colors of their faith once a year to the main streets of downtown Los Angeles. The Sikh population of Los Angeles has a yearly procession through downtown every spring. These processions create a visible and audible experience of religion in city streets. They are significant for the religious community to publicly celebrate their faith. They are also significant for everyone in the city to see and experience the diversity of faiths in the city.

Parks especially seem to attract religious groups for public proclamations of religious teachings. One participant spoke of the variety of street preachers at MacArthur Park on the weekends. He explained,

In some ways I think parks maybe in some ways are similar to a public forum or some people view them as a public forum...There are people who are not listening to people who are preaching, but I think it kinda functions in that way in some ways. Because it's a place where there's a number of people so people who are very convinced of the truth that they believe want to share it with others (Participant S).

Parks are an easy space to proselytize one's faith because of the concentration of people there. Parks are also an easy gathering space for religious communities. One participant talks about the amazing feat of the Alcoholics Anonymous group at Gladys Park in Skid Row, "One of the things that happens in Gladys park is the longest running AA meeting probably in the world. 7 nights a week. But they never missed a night in 14 years (Participant M)." The faithfulness of this community is seen as a sacred activity for the community, even for those that are not in AA.

Finally, public prayer is used as another way of practicing faith in public spaces. One participant shared about setting up prayer stations on the street corners of Skid Row. She mapped the locations of each station on her map and said,

So here, right here, I'm putting crosses, right here...we had prayer stations for a month 8 hours a day, 1 day a week, 4 weeks. We had them in these spots. They were just sandwich boards, hands praying, and it just said prayer. We had pop ups, couple chairs, tiny table, bible, candle and a journal. The two people at each station shifted off different hours. We have 7 journals, we have hundreds of people and their prayers. That was sacred time and those were sacred places. That was an opportunity to really get right to the heart of what people need and I would say the majority of people did not pray for themselves. They prayed for someone else or a situation or the world. And it was for myself very empowering and humbling experience. We would just stand there and say we're praying with people today if you'd like prayer we're here (Participant P).

The participant rallied different congregations to participate in the act of praying for others. They set up a physical presence using a tent, a table, chairs, and a sign. The participant experienced this act of offering prayer to her neighbors as a powerful spiritual experience. The Echo Park UMC congregation engages in communal prayer walking

once a month. They have a map right inside their front door that divides the half-mile radius around their church into different territories. A small group of members is responsible for each territory. Once a month they clean that area. Once a month they go out and pray for that area. One participant said of this task,

One of them is the Jericho prayer walking, the other one is the neighborhood clean up. And then we are designated areas where we can walk around and pray for the neighborhood. We believe that if you cannot do it physically, you just have to bring it to the Lord in prayer. He will listen to you. So we group ourselves and the pastor assigned us areas where we could walk around. It's too early to see the results but it's just praying. You may not be seeing it. You may not be seeing physical things, but something is gonna happen. We believe in that. Something is going to happen. Prayer is very important. If you're not involved in anything, you can pray (Participant T).

For the congregation of Echo Park UMC that is ageing, prayer is a simple way to be a presence in the neighborhood. Furthermore, they believe in a spiritual power that comes with physically walking through the neighborhood together and praying for it.

These examples of communal practices that bring a congregation out into the neighborhood demonstrate the responsibility of being a sacred space in the community. These congregations saw a responsibility to bring the sacred out into the public spaces of the community. These examples also demonstrate that if a religious service is done well it also becomes a third space that facilitates interaction. Congregations should be the first to change the built environment into vigils, celebrations, and places of prayer. Perhaps The Church without Walls knew this responsibility 10 years ago and is the best example of bringing faith to the city streets. They have given up a sacred space with walls in order to bring their practices of faith to a street corner and to turn a street corner into a sacred space. St. Athanasius Episcopal Church is another congregation that recently made the powerful decision to make their space a public space. They opened their sanctuary doors on the weekdays to be a cooling and heating center for any person who needs a place to rest during the day. One participant from St. Athanasius explained,

And I thought we could do that. Nobody uses church buildings during the week and why not do it. I said September and October are the hottest months of the year and the church is air conditioned because of the organ all day anyway (Participant G).

When a church building or religious space is seen as a resource for the community it can become an open space that welcomes the community.

### ***Hindrances***

During the interviews the participants mentioned many positive experiences of living in the city. The participants are people that love the city and love their neighborhoods. During our walks in the city, however, I asked participants to also share the parts of the city that they thought hindered the healthy development and growth of people living in the city. They mentioned several negative experiences of living in the city like crime, trash in the streets, and the frequency of dog poop left on the sidewalk. Ten participants mentioned the growing homeless population as a hindrance to the welfare of the city. In fact, many of them shared about being able to visibly notice the spread of homelessness in the city through the sight of more tents showing up on sidewalks and in hidden corners of the city. 8 participants talked about growing signs of gentrification as a worry for their neighborhood. They do not want their neighbors or themselves to be pushed out of their homes because they cannot afford the rising costs. 7 participants talked about spiritual warfare in their neighborhood. They could sense areas of spiritual darkness when they walk through their streets.

An interesting finding is the affect of negative and overpowering sense experiences. This confirms that the overstimulation of our senses can also cause one to avoid establishing a connection to the places of the city. Interestingly, 8 out of the 9 participants that talked about sense experiences are female. All of the participants were asked a question about negative and positive sense experiences they noticed in the city.

The male participants, however, tended to quickly list a few one-word items of things they enjoy like architecture or trees but they quickly moved away from the question.

Females, however, were more likely to explain how negative sense experiences affected them. One participant described the smells and sounds in Skid Row in this way,

It smells terrible, always smells terrible. Can't even think of a smell that I would regularly smell that I would find pleasant. So when I go home and there's an orange tree in blossom and I'm blown away by how beautiful that smell is I remember how lacking that is in Skid row. You can smell pot everywhere. You can hear sirens. You were here last night. I think we only had 3 times. Sometimes it's every 5 minutes. Every direction is sirens. It's loud. There's boomboxes, people cursing. Seldom are the sounds pleasant (Participant P).

This participant works with the Skid Row population but does not live in Skid Row, but perhaps that heightens her reaction to the sensory stimuli in Skid Row. There is nothing pleasant and the harsh smells and sounds are constant experiences for those that do live there. Another participant in Westlake explains how age has made her less resilient to harsh smells, she said,

By the way, the smells in the city, for a lot of years I've gotten used to it, but it's harder on me again as I get older. I think I have less capacity now that I'm older. I just feel the weight of things a lot more. Seeing all the people like the man that walked by us. Those things are much harder on me now. They enter into me more somehow (Participant C).

This participant referred to difficult sights like a struggling homeless man we passed on our walk as well as difficult smells. She describes in this quote that these senses somehow enter into her, weigh on her, and affect her emotional capacity to live in the city. Another participant in the downtown area specifically talked about the constant irritation of sounds in Skid Row,

Especially Skid Row is so noisy. So the number one thing that people will tell you, they can deal with sleeping outside. They can deal with somebody shooting up next to them. But the fact that it never gets quiet is the worst part of skid row. When it does get quiet on skid row, it's scary. Usually it's not what's wrong, but where is the wrong happening right now. It's terrifying (Participant E).

The constant irritation of sounds and other difficult sense experiences can create greater anxiety and fear. Another participant similarly explained,

I think the sound of the city, like noise pollution is one of the hardest things to deal with sometimes and the smells. Because it can be pretty overwhelming to walk down the street and smell urine all the time. And it's really hard. The sidewalk, especially ours, gets so dirty so fast because people don't curb their pets. It's just a lot of yuck (Participant H).

These findings confirm that the overstimulation of negative sense experiences makes it difficult sometimes to experience the city. For some populations of the city, this experience is all the time.

It is not surprising then that 5 of the 20 participants mention the need to get out of downtown into nature to find sacred space. One downtown participant explained,

It's also kind of the hustle and bustle of downtown. Those things are not mutually exclusive by any stretch but I think it is difficult for me to think about sacred space in downtown. I like to kind of get away to like pray. I'm totally like urbanite, but there's something to be said about just quiet space that is reflective and meditative (Participant Q).

Even though this participant loves the city he still feels there is no sacred space downtown that can replace the quiet spaces one finds outside of the city. The city as a place of human invention cannot replace the grandeur and sacredness of nature.

These common urban ills of trash, homelessness, gentrification, spiritual warfare, noise pollution, and odor pollution take away from experiencing the city as a sacred space. They are reminders that humanity may be far from the truly sacred or divine. They remind us of injustices and pride. Understanding the hindrances to spiritual practices while living in the city is just as important as knowing the positive experiences and practices of the city. We may not be able to solve these urban ills but we can form practices to address them.

### ***Participating in Place***

During my research process I not only studied spaces but I also participated in space. I wanted to know and experience through my body these sacred spaces of Los Angeles. In addition to direct observations I visited cathedrals and spent time in prayer

like the other parishioners. I went on guided walking tours with the Dream Center and the Echo Park Neighborhood Council. I went to Friday Night Farming at Edendale Garden and shared a meal on the rooftop of St. Paul's Cathedral Center. These experiences allowed me to not just study the space but to better understand the space and to experience what others experience in a sacred space. Furthermore, the act of walking together with the interview participants allowed us to experience spaces together. We marveled at murals. We listened to the sounds of birds that one often does not notice in the city. We reflected on the issues of homelessness as we walked by those sitting or lying on the sidewalk. The walking interviews allowed me understand a space through someone else's experience.

My direct observations of sacred spaces led me to four categories of spaces: green spaces, third spaces, sacred memorials, and traditional sacred spaces. Green spaces, as stated earlier, are diverse. There are a variety of people that use green spaces including the homeless population, families, the elderly, and those who work in the area. The most popular times for green spaces are during the lunch hour when those who work in the area find a space to sit and be in the sun for a short break. Each person finds their own space or they come in small groups. They sit on all types of surfaces like the grass, on benches, at tables, or on ledges. After the lunch hour green spaces are also popular on weekends when families congregate around playgrounds. The city government plays a large role in designing green spaces and maintaining these spaces. They also determine what historical persons or events get memorialized in those spaces. For the most part, the people using green spaces ignore these memorials. The only exception is the statue of Oscar Romero at MacArthur Park and Our Lady of the Lake at Echo Park Lake. Both of



these statues carry spiritual significance for the community and thus become places that people will stop to visit. Sacred memorials that are not green spaces, on the other hand, are often empty, quiet, and unused spaces. Those that know of their existence in the city greatly value these spaces, but still they do not visit these spaces often. Third spaces are usually local businesses in the neighborhood that facilitate the gathering of people. In contrast to quiet and peaceful sacred spaces, third spaces are usually vibrant and filled with chatter. As stated earlier, third spaces that the participants also labeled as sacred spaces are the places that invite people to stay and sit for a while. This characteristic is different from other businesses that value efficiency and moving people in and out quickly.

My direct observations of traditional sacred spaces can be categorized into two categories: those that are event-based and those that are open. Traditional sacred spaces that are only open for services, event-based, I could only observe while visiting the congregation. There is a certain time to arrive, short periods of meeting other people before and after the service, and a certain time when everyone leaves. The remainder of the week the event-based sacred space is locked and empty. This experience of event-based traditional sacred spaces is a stark contrast from sacred spaces that open their doors everyday of the week. Catholic cathedrals and Buddhist temples are open traditional sacred spaces. From my observations, these open sacred spaces have a constant rhythm of people moving in and out of the space. They serve as pilgrimage sites in the city for people commuting to and from their daily routines. These spaces feel alive and they often carry more sense-based rituals such as incense and altars. My observations reveal that

spaces that value people such as diversity, gathering people, and being open to visitors are more commonly recognized as sacred spaces for the neighborhood.

A byproduct of this project is a digital map of sacred spaces in downtown Los Angeles, Westlake, Pico Union, and Echo Park. Mapping allowed me to systematically count and record the sacred spaces in the neighborhoods studied for this project, but it also allowed me to experience each space as I visited each one. At each sacred space I took photographs of the space and uploaded them to the digital map. The map includes both formal and informal spaces. Many of the formal spaces are closed during the week and I could only experience the space from the outside. Informal spaces are subjective. Most of the informal spaces on the map are spaces that were mentioned more than once in the interviews. A few of the spaces listed are spaces that I personally find sacred like art spaces, but they were not mentioned in any interviews. The map can be found at <https://findingeden.org/sacredspaces/mapla/>. In addition to a digital map, the website also features sound recordings of the 20 interview participants. After each interview I edited our discussion to create a 2 to 4 minute sound clip for the digital map. Each sound recording correlates with a spot on the digital map. The sound recordings allow those that explore the site to listen to someone else's sacred experience in that sacred space. I hope the digital map can encourage residents of Los Angeles to explore these sacred resources in their city.

## Chapter 6

### Reengaging Sacred Spaces

Discovering a new sacred space in your neighborhood is like finding a hidden treasure. Sacred spaces are places we notice and remember. Sacred spaces as containers of spirituality should be the places in the city that give us a respite from the harsh elements of the urban environment. They should invite us to reflect inwardly and outwardly. They should facilitate connections to a greater purpose. Built environments can be healing, comforting, meaningful, and affirming of community. We need a vision for these kinds of sacred spaces in our cities today. What do the findings of this project say about urban religion and our spirituality in the city? What are urban spiritual practices that facilitate engagement with the places of the city? Mapping revealed a variety of holistic possibilities in Los Angeles to find quiet spaces, green spaces, historical architecture, and third spaces. The following chapter analyzes what the findings reveal about urban religion in Los Angeles. The chapter continues from there to recommend ways for congregations to reengage and reimagine sacred spaces in the city. Finally, this project ends with recommendations for further research.

#### *Religion in Los Angeles*

Looking at the sacred spaces in two Los Angeles neighborhoods offers snapshots of what religion looks like in Los Angeles on any given week. Lived religion in Los Angeles looks like a chabad with services and classes open to anyone curious about their Jewish heritage. Religion in Los Angeles looks like Sikh parades and Spanish posadas through the streets. Religion in Los Angeles looks like The Women's Mosque of America. Religion in Los Angeles looks like evangelical churches taking on the

characteristics of a nightclub or the 110-year anniversary of the Azusa Street revival that drew in 50,000 people to Los Angeles in 2016. Religion in Los Angeles is multicultural, interreligious, colorful, and fervent.

In Los Angeles we can observe the process that Robert Orsi describes as immigrant communities changing the cityscape through their religious practices and gatherings. Korean Christian congregations have taken over office buildings. Small Spanish speaking congregations have adapted storefronts. Japanese, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cambodian Buddhist sects have invested in the building of beautiful temples. In fact, these Buddhist organizations, often sponsored by a family association, are the only ones actually investing in new buildings in the last 5 years. The great diversity of Los Angeles is clearly represented in the formal sacred spaces of the city. The structures of Los Angeles pre-determines how immigrant communities can find and make space for themselves, but at the same time these immigrant communities find creative and new ways to adapt the pre-existing structures.

The findings of this project reveal that historical congregations in downtown, Westlake, Pico Union, and Echo Park may be struggling, but they are adapting by learning to share their space. Even as traditional white protestant congregations are decreasing, the city of Los Angeles is still a highly religious city. Within the approximately 8.5 square miles of this research study there are many religious spaces and congregations. However, religion in Los Angeles may look different than how we picture sacred spaces. These urban religious spaces can be easily missed because they are not at the center of the neighborhood, but they are in the periphery places. Sacred spaces in Los Angeles are predominately ethnic enclaves that find resourceful places to meet.

By the numbers Westlake is much more religious than downtown. Westlake is not only an immigrant community but it is also a family based community. Westlake, Echo Park, and Pico Union, as the first suburbs in Los Angeles, still carry historic sacred spaces that are more than 100 years old. But multiple congregations of different languages now share these spaces or these buildings have been taken over by non-English speaking congregations. The primary form of religious space in these neighborhoods, however, is not in historic buildings. Religion is taking form in these neighborhoods by utilizing office buildings and storefronts on almost every block. Some blocks have more than one storefront church. Religion is also expressed through the sounds of proselytizing in public parks and temporary murals along cement walls. Urban religion in these neighborhoods demonstrates that religious beliefs are not dying in American cities but instead are taking new forms.

Downtown has its own unique phenomenon of recycler congregations. These recyclers, however, are generally not in sync with the rhythms of the city Monday through Friday. Rather they have very little visible presence Monday to Friday, but they tend to put on an impressive show on the weekends. These new groups can also be labeled lifestyle enclaves since their presence is a direct response to the new population boom in downtown. Therefore, protestant and especially evangelical churches are still finding new ways to take place in the city without actually owning space. On the contrary, we see in both Westlake and downtown many types of ethnic enclave congregations from Korean churches to elaborate Orthodox cathedrals to Japanese temples that are planting in places in the city.

### ***Reengaging and Reimagining Space***

The key words in the goals of this study are reengage and reimagine. From the findings I hope that congregations can reengage and reimagine the role of sacred spaces in their cities today to counteract the urban ills of desensitized built environments, displacement, and exclusion. People of faith can do this by practicing a greater attentiveness to place, creating a greater sense of belonging and identity through place, and making a greater effort to break down social barriers. By looking at types of spaces that are effective and how space is used we can explore what these places actually look like and how they take form. Emerging from the findings I propose that we need three practices to reengage with sacred spaces in the city. First, we need to learn to steward space as a resource for the community. Next, we need to see the spaces in the city as liturgical spaces that facilitate interactions between people, the present world, and the spiritual world. Lastly, we need practices of place to learn to live in relationship to place. Effective sacred spaces are those that learn to steward space through communal and liturgical practices and facilitate human interaction and a connection to the city as home.

### ***Stewarding Space***

To study space as the main subject of research means to study the purposes, rhythms and significance of spaces in the city. Therefore, the end result of studying space is to learn how we may use space well. To steward space means to intentionally manage space not only for the benefit of the congregation within but also for the city around the space. This responsibility applies both to congregations that own space as well as congregations that rent space. Sacred spaces are a valued part of the urban ecology. The

life of a building can be vibrant with rhythms of movement or completely empty of life. To steward space is to create life-giving spaces for the city.

As Katie Day mentioned in *Faith on the Avenue* a congregation and its sacred space has agency in the neighborhood.<sup>172</sup> From Day's research this agency is facilitated through the members of a congregation and particularly the social capital they build with other residents of the city throughout the week. This project proposes the idea that a congregation also has agency in how they choose to use their space, share their space, and how they choose to use spaces in the city outside of their own building. When a religious community owns, buys, or rents a space in a neighborhood they become an agent in that neighborhood. They have power. They have a voice. As religious communities fill in office buildings, theaters, storefronts, and warehouses they make choices on how they will transform a nondescript space into a sacred space. They also decide how they will engage with the neighbors around their space. What will they bring to the neighborhood?

I suggest that there are two frameworks for stewarding space as valued entities in the community. First, we must tell the stories of space. Second, we must steward the day-to-day presence of a space. Through the interviews in this project I heard many stories about the spaces and places of Los Angeles. By hearing stories of sacred spaces in Los Angeles we learn about the lasting legacy of these spaces and see the possibilities of what sacred spaces can be used for. In the history of Little Tokyo we hear stories of how temples and churches served as community centers. And in moments of crisis like the Japanese internment the spaces of the Little Tokyo temples and churches were used to

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<sup>172</sup> Day and Conboy, *Faith on the Avenue*, 26.

house families and to help them reestablish their lives. In the 1970's cathedrals around the city like La Placita and Angelica Lutheran Church served as sanctuary churches to protect undocumented migrants. These stories are the lasting legacy of what a space can be used for. The stories of Biddy Mason, Oscar Romero, and Aimee Semple McPherson form the history of Los Angeles. By telling their stories through places like the Biddy Mason Wall, the Oscar Romero statue, and Angelus Temple those stories become placed and real. These places become places of meaning in the city. Therefore, a guiding question to ask when stewarding space is what is the spatial narrative of this sacred space? What story does this space tell? We need stories of places in the city that are encouraging and hopeful. We also need stories that speak to a reality greater than ourselves.

Next, a sacred space maintains a day-to-day presence in the neighborhood. Therefore, those that utilize a sacred space steward how that presence is communicated and what message is communicated. In the past cathedral towers presented a visible presence of the sacred to the town and the church bells served as audible markers to communicate the presence of the sacred. Even in Asian cities, like we see in Chinatown Los Angeles, the sounds of chanting on loudspeakers reverberate from the local temples and the smell of incense communicate the presence of altars as the smells waft down a sidewalk. So in modern cities when these sights, sounds, and smells become rare how is a sacred space at the periphery of a neighborhood to communicate its presence? The reality is we may pass by many sacred spaces on our daily commutes and know nothing about those spaces or the people that gather there. The presence that many sacred spaces communicate is a locked door except on Sundays. Therefore, sacred spaces can begin to



steward space by being a visible presence in the neighborhood. The findings of this paper present creative ideas for how communities are communicating their presence through meals, urban gardens, parades, cooling shelters, and cleaning the neighborhood. Furthermore, the findings reveal what spaces people tend to look for in the city. The residents of the city search for places of beauty, resources, safety, diversity, a sense of peace, people, and a sacred presence. These results should inform how we steward sacred space. Although most religious communities in the city may not be able to design and build sacred architecture, they can create a sacred presence in many informal and liturgical ways.

Not only religious congregations, but cities also have a role in creating sacred spaces. Echo Park is one example of the power of the city to create a sacred space for the families in the city. One participant said, “Now it’ll be 3 years this August that they put 45 million dollars into the lake and redid Echo Park and that’s brought back a lot of people. We get a lot of guests that walk the lake, young couples...(Participant L).” The city has great influence in creating powerful places in the city especially in informal spaces like parks and memorials. Unidad park is a great example of a powerful space. Unidad park is a small but well-utilized space. In this 560 square feet space, the size of a typical one bedroom house, is a community garden, a small track around the park, a playground for kids, a shaded area with tables and grills for sharing a meal, and even a half circle that kids use to play soccer. On the West side of the park is a large mural that spans the whole length of the park. The mural is bold and colorful. The mural is also meaningful in that it commemorates the heroes of Filipino American history. Therefore,

the city not only has influence on big green spaces like Grand Park in front of city hall, but they also influence the pocket parks that can become a safe haven for local families.

How a community stewards its spaces will depend on the unique needs of each neighborhood. The kinds of sacred spaces skid row needs in a built environment that excludes those without a place to go in the city will be very different than the sacred spaces that are needed in the aging populations of Little Tokyo and Chinatown. One avenue to begin thinking through the best ways to steward space is to think through the 7 characteristics that are valued by the participants of this project. Places of beauty, resources, safety, diversity, a sense of peace, people, and a sacred presence are likely common needs that people in all neighborhoods look for and are drawn to. To steward one's sacred space is to be a visible and valuable space in the community.

### ***Liturgical spaces***

Generally, liturgy is a set order of religious rituals and practices that facilitate a community's engagement with their faith. Liturgical practices are practices that facilitate the relationship between individuals and the supernatural or individuals and their inner life. To be a liturgical space then is to be a space that facilitates spiritual interactions. This is similar to Richard Kieckhefer and Sigurd Bergmann's understanding of sacred spaces as liturgical spaces. Their definitions, however, emphasized the practices whereas research participants in this study emphasized the interaction and connections. Liturgical spaces facilitate human-to-human interaction, human to God interaction, and human to inner-self interaction. A sacred space does not only carry its own history and story, but sacred spaces facilitate a spiritual narrative for people in the neighborhood.

To understand a sacred space as a liturgical space for the city requires a shift in perspective. An old church or an open space can be sacred as long as people can reimagine what is possible there. As one participant wrote,

The places for sacred space are here, are present. And so what lacks is a catalyst and a convener. We've used the great hall over there. It has been sacred space for this neighborhood at times. So it's a place where sacred space can happen. Just like the church is a place where sacred space can happen. So part of it is the catalyst and part of the catalyst has to do with giving people a category for it. I think there's a longing that is so diffuse that people aren't even aware of it. I think that mentality needs to be awakened in order for sacred space to be valued enough to be recognized in the places where it could happen (Participant G).

According to this pastor once his parishioners see the possibility, or in his words the catalyst, for why a space is a valuable resource and how sacred moments can happen in a space they can dream of ways to utilize their spaces as well as public spaces. Sacred spaces as liturgical places for the city are places that form spirituality and spiritual practices for the city.

One essential way for a sacred space to serve as a liturgical space for the city is through reimagining its role as a public space rather than private space. Philip Sheldrake argues that sacred spaces should be the first to be open as a public space for the city.<sup>173</sup> Most religious congregations use their space as an event-based space. They have set times of gathering and they open their doors for set events. An event-based space can be contrasted to an open space. An open space is accessible for longer periods of time. Like James Rojas' study on the role of plazas in Latin America, an open space becomes a gathering space for different types of people at different times of the day and week. Open spaces fit into the rhythms of the city with a flow of people in and out on their daily commutes. Open spaces invite people to stay and dwell. The courtyard of La Placita is such an open space. The church is open from dawn to dusk each day. The chapel serves

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<sup>173</sup> Sheldrake, "A Spiritual City," 10.

as a contemplative place of prayer and meditation, but the courtyard with a tamale stand and gift shop is a place where the elderly will sit for an afternoon or families will play on Sundays. When a church building or religious space is seen as a public resource for the community it can become an open space that invites the community.

The first step of a liturgical space is to simply be open and available to the community, but the second step is to facilitate interactions with the inner-self, the present world, and the spiritual world. We need spaces that give us a sense of something greater. For this reason, people of Pentecostal and charismatic Christian faith find it meaningful to visit Azusa Street. Today, Azusa Street is just a small alley with dumpsters. There is not much to see there other than a hidden plaque in the middle of a Japanese plaza. But being in the space somehow connects believers to a spiritual history and spiritual encouragement for today. It is an open space and memorial space that facilitates a connection between individuals, God, and spiritual history. Cathedrals are another example of open spaces that facilitate interactions. Cathedrals have long served the community as open contemplative and liturgical space for the neighborhood. Whereas most other religious buildings are closed during the week, Catholic cathedrals tend to be open every weekday. Cathedrals are what Jones called contemplatives spaces for the city.<sup>174</sup> People can stop by and use the building, altars, and other features of the built environment to facilitate a moment of inward reflection, to communicate with God, or to simply find rest. Therefore, sacred spaces have always been and continue to be places that facilitate the divine human encounter. The research findings demonstrate, however, that the place of encounter does not have to be a formal cathedral. The place of divine

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<sup>174</sup> Jones, *Hermeneutics*, 214.

human encounter can be a memorial, a temporary vigil, or a quiet bench in the park. All of these spaces can become liturgical spaces if they help facilitate spiritual encounters.

Next, a truly liturgical sacred space should also facilitate rich human-to-human interactions. In a society where human-to-human interaction is often tense or non-existent, sacred spaces serve as spaces that can facilitate redemptive human-to-human conversations and relationships. Thus, sacred spaces can reimagine its role to not only be open but also to be a third space again for the neighborhood. Not many sacred spaces in cities today have embraced this role. The Pico Union project is one example of a sacred space that uses cultural events, political events, and religious events to bring different voices of the community together. They also hold weekly farmer's markets and are in the process of opening a café on site. Viewing a sacred space as a third space invites people to stay and to share space with their neighbors. In Ray Oldenburg's book on third spaces called *The Great Good Place* he discovered that churches can be powerful third spaces. He wrote, "Two clear conclusions were drawn (1) community social life is necessary to healthy religious life, and (2) if the church is going to succeed it must recognize the social needs of the community and assume its share of the leadership in social activities."<sup>175</sup> Therefore, the congregation within a sacred space needs social connections just as much as they hold responsibility to facilitate social connections for the community. In cities where the experience of loneliness is especially prevalent, sacred spaces can exemplify a space where people can know other people. One participant from First United Methodist Church downtown said,

There are so many people who just want to have a sense of family again. And I just want to be able to say First (UMC) has that for you. I see First being such an emotional anchor for a lot of folks and we have the capacity. And I think there's tons of people in the neighborhood who have

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<sup>175</sup> Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, 74.

that capacity. They just have no idea where to go. Or even better they do not want to give up Sunday brunch for church. I'm good with that because church doesn't happen just on Sundays (Participant E).

The participant expressed in this quote that it is difficult to know where one might go in the city to find a connection to other people and to feel a sense of family. Sacred spaces can be a welcoming space that offers that connection and even more a sacred space can be a welcoming space any day of the week and not just during set services.

In this study third spaces were difficult to count. There are plenty of restaurants, coffee shops, and bars in the neighborhood, but that does not qualify them as a sacred space unless people feel a connection happening there. Therefore, I paid attention to the named spaces. The Last Bookstore was named several times as a sacred space in downtown. Although it is a bookstore, it is a space that facilitates community events, open mic nights, and talks by authors. Furthermore, the space has artistic features that are fun and intriguing like a book tunnel. The Last Bookstore has come to be a symbol of life downtown. Thus it has become sacred to the community because it is a place where people can meet other people from the community. The Last Bookstore is an example for religious communities in the neighborhood. If the population is drawn to parks, public spaces, and third spaces, then that is also where the sacred should be found.

Sacred spaces not only tell stories of the space and history, but sacred spaces tell stories of the people that live in the neighborhood. In the interviews I found that even a police station can become a sacred place because of one person who's story is making a difference in the neighborhood. Officer Deon not only regularly patrols the streets of skid row but he shows up at community forums and meetings. He is invested in the people of the neighborhood. Now when people think of the police station, they not only think of him but his presence makes the police station a sacred space. In the same way, non-

profits become sacred because of what they do to transform lives. Some helpful questions to ask are who is telling the story of downtown and Westlake? What is the responsibility of churches in the neighborhood to tell the story of its people?

Lastly, a liturgical space that facilitates human-to-human interaction can counteract the individualism and exclusion that is prevalent in cities. A liturgical space that facilitates the values of faith communities should strive to be a just and ethical space. If sacred spaces brought people together instead of segmenting the populations of the neighborhood, it would begin to counteract the affects of exclusion in cities. Perhaps sharing space is one way of bringing the segments of a neighborhood together. Sacred spaces can calm our fears of exposure by exposing us to people unlike ourselves. Sacred spaces can be places where humans are valued and not excluded. Parks are especially experienced as a sacred space because it is a space where all can be welcome and find their own space. Gorringer's question is a helpful guide for creating an ethical liturgical space he asks, "what does this space believe in?"<sup>176</sup> Religious congregations need to ask themselves what do they believe in so that they might inscribe their beliefs into their spaces and how they utilize their space.

### ***Our relationship with place***

Finally, to reengage and reimagine the role of sacred spaces in the neighborhood we need practices of place. We need regular spiritual practices that connect us with the city and help us to experience the city as home. Routine spiritual practices can help us live in relationship with place. Nancy Ammerman writes that the members of religious congregations create a network map based on their patterns of movement in the city

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<sup>176</sup> Gorringer, *The Common Good*, 62.

throughout the week.<sup>177</sup> Participants create a network map not just in where they spend their money or where they maintain relationships, but they create a map of how they live in the neighborhood, where they find meaningful, and how they engage with the place in which they live. Each participant creates a map of meaningful living by where they go regularly, where they sit and think, where they feel connected to something bigger. From the findings of this study we see that religion is practiced in everyday patterns, not just in sacred spaces. Religion is practiced in walking. Religion is practiced in meaningful encounters on the street. Religion is practiced in helping one's neighbor. Therefore, we need tangible places and practices to find sacred meaning in the ordinary places of the city.

This project engaged a phenomenological study of how religion is practiced and experienced in the city. Even though 19 of 20 participants are Christian the interviews did not focus on their beliefs but on their practices and experiences. Since the participants shared a faith their interpretations may be similar, but their practices and experiences of the city may be common for other people of faith or non-faith throughout the city. The participants have each learned a way of living in the city. They walk frequently, they know what paths to walk, and they know where to go to find a quiet spot. They know where to eat and get a coffee all within walking distance of their home or office. They know where to take their child to play or where to take their dog for a walk. They have formed protective measures for how to respond to noise and homelessness. Therefore, we see through the practices of the research participants that the built environment very much influences how the participants experience spirituality in the city. Each

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<sup>177</sup> Ammerman, *Studying Congregations*, 51.



neighborhood by its built environment will create a different way of engaging with that environment. Beijing will form different practices than Los Angeles. If blocks are too big, if places are too spread out people will not walk. If there are no places for children to play, then parents may not have a chance to meet and mutually support one another. Therefore, there needs to be places in the city where the city and spirituality are experienced meaningfully at the same time.

### **Developing spiritual practices of place in the city**

The findings from this project unexpectedly revealed four helpful and common ways to develop healthy practices of spirituality in the city. First, the city is experienced through our bodies and our senses. Therefore, our spiritual experiences in the city, in the neighborhood, and even in the home should also take into account our physical and sense experiences. Our spiritual experiences are simultaneously inward and outward experiences. How we practice place and how we practice religion are mutually exclusive. Therefore, we need physical practices in the city that attend to the inner life. As Sigurd Bergmann explains religion is a skill of lived religion in lived space.<sup>178</sup> So, we need to learn the skills of practices like walking, praying, and caring for the neighborhood that allow us to visualize and touch the characteristics of the supernatural in our regular experiences of the city. Sacred spaces are noticed because they are usually spaces that offer full sense experiences and in them we feel human and alive.

Second, we also need practices to help residents of the city handle the harshness of urban ills, spiritual warfare, and difficult sense experiences. The participants found it important to not become desensitized to difficult experiences of the city. Rather, they

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<sup>178</sup> Bergmann, *Religion, Space, Environment*, 75.

allowed the difficult experiences of the city to guide their prayers and their care for the city. When I visited the Tuesday night bible study at Central City Community Outreach they stopped their discussions and prayed each time a siren is heard. A siren is very disruptive in a meeting, but rather than trying to ignore the disruption they created a habit that brings greater attentiveness to respond to the urban environment. During the night I visited this community we stopped to pray three times. These habits formed in response to the challenging aspects of living in the city are ways to be present in the city and to respond with intention rather than trying to ignore.

A third spiritual practice for religious congregations in the city is to take their practices outside to public spaces. The participants in this study found that sharing liturgical traditions in public spaces is an especially meaningful way to engage with the city. Yi Fu Tuan wrote that we have moved rituals indoors and that has made our religious practices more private and conceptual.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, we need to bring our practices outside to experience religion as public and practical. Liturgy does not need to happen in a designated place, but the practices can be taken outside. Liturgy even in a difficult environment like skid row can momentarily create a sacred corner. Therefore, congregations in the city can experiment and be creative with new ways of taking liturgy outside.

The last practice for forming a spirituality in the city is through acts of placemaking. Placemaking is a term from the field of urban planning and there is a current revival in the popularity of placemaking to create urban built environments that counteract displacement and isolation. Placemaking is creating both permanent and

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<sup>179</sup> Tuan, *Romantic Geography*, 17.

temporary spaces in the city that bring people together in fun and creative ways. The church and other religious communities can easily get involved in the acts of placemaking using their own space or in other spaces of the city. Placemaking particularly helps in creating unique and stronger neighborhood identities so that residents are proud to call their neighborhood home. Placemaking helps create a neighborhood identity and sense of belonging so that being a resident of Echo Park or Chinatown now carries its own unique characteristic and meaning. There is even a skid row identity. Organizing and placemaking practices throughout skid row and especially in Gladys Park helps create a skid row unity. These placemaking practices can be a karaoke night, a parade, or even an event for kids. Placemaking is using creative ideas and activities to gather people together utilizing a space in the neighborhood. Space is used to create meaningful moments. A neighborhood identity is also formed in providing a variety of resources within walking distance of where people live so that one does not have to drive around to get basic necessities. Church, groceries, coffee shops, and restaurants can all be in one place. When you engage in activities in your neighborhood you develop a neighborhood identity. This phenomenon is true of rural living and needs to be cultivated for the city. Several of the sacred spaces in Los Angeles, formal and informal, demonstrate that the formation of strong neighborhood identities is already happening.

### ***Contributions***

I believe that the findings of project contribute new ideas to the field of practical theology and especially to the study of lived religion in the city. At the same time, these findings can also offer helpful contributions to leaders of religious congregations as well

as people that live in cities. First, this project offers examples for how to apply visual research methods to the study of lived religion. Methodologies that are active and involve the body can reveal new ways of understanding the phenomenology of lived religion. In this project, for example, mapping the city and walking through the city helped facilitate the interviews and guided the discussions. Second, the digital map created out of this study offers a creative way to visually represent research findings of lived religion. Therefore, not only does the content of this project offer another case study for the study of urban religion, but also the methodologies offer new ideas for the future study of lived religion. The main contribution of this project, however, is to encourage religious leaders to think about their spaces in new and creative ways. This project gives many examples of creative practices of sacred spaces and it also offers guidelines for how to steward space, create liturgical spaces, and how to practice place in urban contexts. I hope that these suggestions will stimulate even more ideas for how urban congregations utilize sacred spaces and create sacred spaces in the city. Finally, I hope that the findings of this study will also contribute to the day-to-day living of urban dwellers that long for spiritual connections in the city. Connecting to the city as a place of spiritual encounter requires weekly rhythms and practices. This project contributes a practical map for finding sacred spaces in the city of Los Angeles and also suggestions for spiritual practices that nurture spirituality in the city.

### ***For Further Study***

As the researcher I was particularly interested in a Christian experience of spirituality in the city. Therefore, all but one of the interview participants identified as Christian. The first area for further research, then, is to incorporate other voices of the

city. By not fully representing all the voices of the neighborhood, this project did not present a full image of the neighborhood. This is a limitation of this study. Therefore, to fully understand urban sacred spaces we need to hear from other people of faith, other faith leaders in these neighborhoods, as well as residents of Los Angeles that identify as religious nones. It is likely that people of other faiths and religious nones may define sacred space very differently. Furthermore, although the sacred spaces identified in this project were not all Christian places I could have easily missed nontraditional religious spaces that were not advertised or easily seen from the streets. This project only had capacity to create a digital map of sacred spaces in two Los Angeles neighborhoods. Another suggestion for further research then is to study the use of and effectiveness of a digital map and then to create digital maps of sacred spaces for other neighborhoods in Los Angeles as well as other major cities around the world. It would be interesting to compare maps of sacred spaces from other cities and particularly non-US cities.

### ***Conclusion***

At the end of this project the definition of sacred space has changed. Although the elements of previous definitions are scattered throughout each participant's descriptions and experiences of sacred space, their definitions are not theoretical or idealistic. How the participants defined sacred spaces did not necessarily have to do with a congregation engaged in rituals or a socially constructed cultural group. Although those definitions are still true and present in the sacred spaces of Los Angeles, the participants identified sacred spaces as green, diverse, caring, safe, and beautiful. Sacred spaces are identified by properties that exemplify the best of nature and the best of humanity. This understanding of sacred space can be considered a laymen's understanding or experience

of the sacred. Sacred spaces in cities today are less institutional and organized. And even organized spaces are not necessarily formal. Therefore, how residents of the city define sacred spaces and how they use sacred spaces need to be incorporated into the city and how we engage with the city.

During this research study my most intimate connection with a sacred space occurred when I pulled weeds at Edendale Garden. Edendale Garden is a community garden at St. Paul's Cathedral Center in Echo Park. The garden is run by Seeds of Hope which maintains several urban community gardens around Los Angeles. They teach classes to the community on gardening and nutrition. What makes Edendale Garden sacred is not simply because it is a rare green space in the city, but the space also features a living labyrinth. A labyrinth is a contemplative structure that facilitates the practice of prayer and meditation while walking through a maze-like pattern. I first visited Edendale Garden at the beginning of the summer. The ground was hard. The labyrinth had a path created by netting, but the path was bare. We weeded and added fish fertilizer. I went back to Edendale Garden at the end of the summer. We picked tomatoes and leafy greens. The living labyrinth had grown. As one walks along the maze one can see basil, tomatoes, leafy greens, and eggplants. As you walk the living labyrinth you are encouraged to stop and pull out a weed or stop and eat a tomato. After a few hours of harvesting, watering, and more weeding, we went to the rooftop for a community dinner. We were strangers now connected by our experience of working the garden together. Edendale is now a thick sacred place to me because I experienced meeting new neighbors there, I experienced the soil there, and I experienced a moment of contemplative reflection. My experience of Edendale exemplifies a sacred space that stewards an empty

plot of land, creates a liturgical space that facilitates multiple layers of spiritual interactions, and offers the practice of placemaking through gardening.

To reengage and reimagine urban sacred spaces we need a holistic understanding of the city. Therefore I like to see the city as a “holy playground” where the urban ecology is equipped with meaningful and sacred places. Playgrounds have a rhythm. Children move from slide to swing to monkey bars. Sometimes children move from one place to another intentionally, but sometimes they move on a whim. Sometimes they play a game with other children. Sometimes they play by themselves perfectly content in their own world of pretend and make believe. Adults need the same kind of experience in the places where they live. They need to build rhythms into their relationship with the city. Urban residents need to experience the city as a playground of play and creativity but also meaning and purpose. The city can be that playground if we learn to create intentional rhythms. Some places we go to intentionally, and other places we stop by on a whim. In some places we engage in meaningful conversations with others, but in other places we are perfectly content to be engaged in our own inner dialogue. The traditional historical sacred spaces in the city provide a unique and necessary feature to the urban playground. Sanctuary spaces are inherently quiet even if there are people praying inside. Beautiful, traditional sacred architecture gives the aura of something supernatural because they are spaces so different from the chaos outside. From this study we learn that informal sacred spaces are also needed in the urban playground. We need open spaces that facilitate encounters with other people in our neighborhoods. We need spaces that are green and pushed back from the busy street. We need creative spaces and places of resources. We need symbolic and metaphorical places. We need places to celebrate like a

religious festival in the park and we need places to mourn like a sidewalk vigil.

Experiencing the spaces and places of the city as an urban playground will help form and frame our spiritual identity as well as our neighborhood identity. In the end, the spaces and places of the city may not be intentionally noticed as urban dwellers go about their busy lives. But as sacred spaces today take on alternative forms, find new rhythms, and develop new purposes they can become places in the city that encourage urban dwellers to pause for a moment of attentiveness to life, to the city, to themselves, to the people around them, and to a greater entity beyond themselves.



## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Preliminary Questions:

- How did you get involved in this neighborhood?
- How has this neighborhood changed since you've been here?
- How has *participant's organization* changed with the changing neighborhood?
- What role do you hope that *participant's organization* can be for this neighborhood?

### Mapping:

Create a map of the neighborhood including the places that you routinely visit in the neighborhood. The map is just a rough sketch.

- What are the sacred spaces to you in this neighborhood? Identify them on the map.
- What would other people in the neighborhood identify as sacred spaces to them?
- What place in the neighborhood represents the community's identity?
- What kind of sacred spaces does the community need now?

### Walking:

In discussion with the research participant the researcher and participant will decide on a sacred space to visit in the neighborhood.

- What are the positive and negative forces that you see in this neighborhood?
- What do you like or dislike about the neighborhood?
- What are your sense experiences when you walk around the neighborhood?
- After arriving at the sacred space...*
- What do you usually do in this space?
- What makes this space sacred to you?

## Appendix B: Direct Observation Chart

### Direct Observation of Sacred Spaces

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Who uses the space?

### Built Environment

Materials:	Landmarks:
Symbols:	Practices and Activities:
Center focus:	Shape: (Pathways, Edges, Nodes)
How are people drawn in?	
Aesthetics:	
Power:	

### Comparison Chart

Private	Public	Includes people	Excludes people
Formal	Informal	Space	Place
Open	Closed	Safe	Unsafe
Secluded	Visible	Rest	Play
Noisy	Quiet	Dirty	Clean
Dark	Light	Old	New
Shade	Sun	Introverted	Extroverted
Direct engagement	Indirect engagement		

### The Rhythms of the Space

How was it created?	Meaning to Community:
Who owns it?	Do people connect?
Myths	Events
Rituals	Why is it Sacred?

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

### Consent to Participate in Research

#### Identification of Investigator and Purpose of Study

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled “Mapping the Urban Sacred Spaces of Los Angeles.” The study is being conducted by Cindy Lee under the supervision of Dr. Andrew Dreitcer of Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N. College Ave; Claremont, CA 91711, [adreitcer@cst.edu](mailto:adreitcer@cst.edu), (909) 447-2542.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the sacred spaces in *insert neighborhood name*, Los Angeles. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of how we can develop an urban spirituality in the everyday places and rhythms of the city. You are free to contact the investigator using the information below to discuss the study.

Cindy Lee  
1033 N. Broadway Los Angeles, CA 90012  
(630) 914-4666 [Cindy.Lee@cst.edu](mailto:Cindy.Lee@cst.edu)

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

If you agree to participate:

- The interview will consist of one approximately 1.5 hour interview.
- Your participation is intended to find out about the significant places of *insert neighborhood name*, Los Angeles and your experiences of those places.
- Your participation will consist of a 1.5 hour interview activity. The first hour is a one-on-one interview. During that time you will be asked to draw a simple map of significant sacred places in the city. You will be asked questions about those places. In the second half, we will tour your facilities or walk together to one of the places you identified on your map. During the walk the researcher will continue to ask you questions about your experience of the city. At the destination, the researcher will take photographs of the place. The 1.5-hour interview will be recorded using a sound recorder. A short sound clip from the interview will then be used on an online platform that maps the sacred spaces of the city.
- You will be compensated for your time. You will receive a \$25 amazon gift card at the end of the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study before or during the interview, you will not receive the \$25 amazon gift card. If you choose to withdraw your sound clip from the online digital map anytime after the interview, you may still keep the \$25 amazon gift card.

#### Risks/Benefits/Confidentiality of Data

There are some possible risks. There is a walking activity during the interview process. If you are physically unable to walk the distance or in any other way uncomfortable with the walking activity, you may inform the researcher of your decision to withdraw from the interview. If you agree to participate in the interview but are unable to engage in the walking interview you may use your own assistive device for transportation to visit a mutually agreed upon location in the neighborhood. The researcher is unable to provide any assistive devices for transportation but the participant may also request to extend the sit down interview in lieu of a walking interview. By signing this informed consent form you are agreeing that the researcher is not liable for any

physical harm received during the interview.

Your name, email address and other personally identifiable information will be kept securely during the data collection phase and deleted after the conclusion of the research. A short sound clip will be publicly released through a web platform. The sound clip will be attributed to your first name. You may choose, however, for your sound clip to be anonymous. If you desire to keep your sound clip anonymous, there is a risk that someone may be able to identify the sound of your voice. I will confirm your permission to release the sound clip once a segment is selected. Other than the sound clip, no other personally identifiable information will be publicly released. Your personal information, if collected, will be used solely for tracking purposes. The researcher will be the only person to have access to the data during data collection.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity other than your sound clip with your first name unless you choose to be anonymous. If audio recordings of your participation are used for educational purposes, you will only be identified by your first name or anonymously. You will not be shown in any photographs. Your information will be stored until May 2018 in a password-protected, private hard drive and then destroyed. Once a map of urban sacred spaces is made available online you will be informed of how you may access and use the map.

### **Participation or Withdrawal**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with Claremont School of Theology in any way. If you do not want to participate, you may simply stop participating. If you withdraw from the study before or during the interview, you will not receive a \$25 amazon gift card. If you withdraw your sound clip from the online digital map anytime after the interview, you may still keep the \$25 gift card.

### **Contacts**

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address contact the primary investigator Cindy Lee at (630) 914-4666 or send an email to [Cindy.Lee@cst.edu](mailto:Cindy.Lee@cst.edu). This study has been reviewed by Claremont School of Theology Institutional Review Board and the study number is [2016-15](#).

### **Questions about your rights as a research participant.**

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the chair of the Institutional Review Board by phone at (909) 447-6344 or email at [irb@cst.edu](mailto:irb@cst.edu).  
Thank you.

### **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

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Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

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Date

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Address

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Phone

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Email

**SIGNATURE OF WITNESS**

My signature as witness certifies that the participant signed this consent form in my presence as his/her voluntary act and deed.

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Name of Witness

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Signature of Witness

---

Date (same as participant's)

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

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Signature of Investigator

---

Date

**A copy of this document will be supplied for your records.**

**Voice Recording Release Form:**

I consent to allow a 1 to 5 minute audio clip of my interview to be made available as part of the "Mapping the Sacred Spaces of Los Angeles" project. I know that means my audio will be available on a digital platform such as a website and might be published to show the results of the study. For example, my audio recording may be used in a dissertation, website, online journal, or in a conference presentation. I know that my first name will be used on a web platform associated with the audio clip unless I notify the researcher that I would like the audio kept anonymous. If I desire to keep the audio clip anonymous, I know that there is the risk that the sound of my voice can also identify me with the audio clip and selected sacred space.

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Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

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Date

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Signature of Investigator

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Date

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